

Suffolk Sheriff Steven Tompkins accepting political donations to pay for legal defense

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By Chris Van Buskirk



Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins leaves the Boston federal courthouse last week with his defense attorney Martin Weinberg. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins is accepting political donations to pay for his legal defense in a federal case in which he is accused of extorting a cannabis company, [according to a filing](#) with state campaign finance regulators.

In creating a legal defense fund with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance, Tompkins can take in money from virtually anyone, including businesses, out-of-state donors, and people who have already contributed the maximum amount this year to his political campaign.

“Fighting the federal government is hard and expensive,” Tompkins said in a statement to WBUR Monday. “Many supporters have sought to help, and I have established the fund so they can do that.”

Federal prosecutors [have accused Tompkins](#) of pressuring a cannabis executive for stock in their company before it went public, and later demanding his money back when the stock plunged.

He allegedly threatened to end a hiring partnership run by the sheriff's office that was key to the cannabis company's license if the executive did not sell him the stock.

Tompkins, a Democrat from Boston's Hyde Park, pleaded not guilty in August to the accusations and enlisted a nationally recognized criminal defense attorney, Martin Weinberg, to represent him in court. Weinberg is [pushing](#) for the case to be dismissed.

Tompkins can use his legal defense fund to raise and spend unlimited amounts of money for his federal court case.

Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Leah Foley's office, which is [prosecuting the case against Tompkins](#), did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In the filing with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance, Tompkins listed the federal case number as the “purpose” of the account. Renee Brandon, a tax professional with RSC Financial Services in Pembroke, is listed as the person who will file financial reports on behalf of the fund.

Tompkins did not say Monday how much he plans to raise from donors or what his legal costs have been so far. He also did not say if he'll accept cash from businesses.

Tompkins can transfer money from his campaign account to his legal defense fund. But the sheriff emptied his campaign account in October by repaying himself \$9,821 that he had previously loaned his campaign, state data shows.

Any money raised in December through Tompkins' legal defense fund must be reported to the state's campaign finance office by early January, according to regulators.

Tompkins is on leave from the Suffolk County Sheriff's Office but still holds the elected position. He is due back in court Wednesday for a hearing on a motion to suppress evidence law enforcement authorities seized from his Comcast and Google email accounts.

Elected officials and candidates for political office have long turned to their donor networks to help fend off legal issues.

State Sen. Ryan Fattman, a Sutton Republican who [settled allegations in 2023](#) that he funneled cash through the state Republican party to fund his wife's political campaign, raised nearly \$309,000 over two years through a legal defense fund, according to state records.

Former state Sen. Dean Tran, who was [sentenced in February](#) on charges of wire fraud and filing false tax returns, raised more than \$30,000 through a legal defense fund between April 2020 and August 2024, state data shows.

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