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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Ohio

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, February 3, 2021

Former Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority member offers guilty plea to bribery offense

COLUMBUS, Ohio – A former Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority member offered his guilty plea in U.S. District Court today to honest services wire fraud related to a contract with the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

According to his plea, in 2014 and 2015, John P. Raphael, 65, of Columbus, received bribes and kickbacks from a food-service company in exchange for official acts.

Raphael was a member of the Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority board and also served as its treasurer. In those roles, he had a duty to provide honest services to the FCCFA, to Franklin County, and to the people of Franklin County. The FCCFA owned and operated the Greater Columbus Convention Center

In 2014, FCCFA engaged in a confidential bidding process to select a food vendor for the Greater Columbus Convention Center. Four companies submitted bids.

Without disclosing it to the FCCFA, Raphael became a consultant for one of the four companies. In the consulting agreement, the company agreed to pay Raphael a monthly retainer of \$5,000 and a "success fee" of \$40,000 if the company was able to secure the contract.

Raphael repeatedly took official acts to benefit the food-service company in exchange for money.

On July 8, 2014, Raphael received an email containing a draft of the request for proposal, or RFP, which in its final form would solicit bids from prospective food-service vendors for the Greater Columbus Convention Center. The email also contained a draft of a sample contract that prospective vendors would be expected to execute in the event they won the bid.

Thirty-six minutes after receiving these documents, Raphael sent them to an employee of the company he was assisting.

The draft RFP and draft sample contract were confidential documents and were not to be circulated beyond the FCCFA. Raphael did not share the documents with any other prospective bidder.

The company Raphael was assisting expressed two “items of concern” with the draft RFP and requested two changes. Each of the proposed changes was made part of the final contract that the FCCFA and the company Raphael was assisting signed.

Raphael sent other documents to the company that were useful to it and that he did not share with the other prospective bidders. Raphael also participated in FCCFA meetings related to the bidding process without disclosing that he was working for the company.

The company Raphael was assisting ultimately won the contract. Two days after the contract was signed, Raphael sent an invoice for the \$40,000 “success fee.” The company paid the fee. In total, Raphael received \$144,00 from the company through the consulting agreement.

Honest services wire fraud is a federal crime punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Congress sets the maximum statutory sentence. Sentencing of the defendant will be determined by the Court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors.

Vipal J. Patel, who is Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio for this case; Chris Hoffman, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Cincinnati Division; and Ohio Ethics Commission Executive Director Paul M. Nick announced the plea offered today before U.S. Magistrate Judge Norah McCann King. Assistant United States Attorney Peter K. Glenn-Applegate and Special Assistant United States Attorney J. Michael Marous are representing the United States in this case.

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Topic(s):

Public Corruption

Component(s):

USAO - Ohio, Southern

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