

The Gainesville Sun | Gainesville.com

NEWS

Former state attorney Jeffrey Siegmeister pleads guilty to bribery, conspiracy to commit extortion

Staff report

Published 4:40 p.m. ET Feb. 23, 2022 | Updated 4:51 p.m. ET Feb. 23, 2022

A former state attorney from Suwannee County pleaded guilty to bribery and conspiracy to commit extortion with a defense attorney on Wednesday, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

The DOJ announced Wednesday that Jeffrey Siegmeister, 53, of Live Oak, admitted guilt to four felony charges in all, including wire fraud and filing a false tax return as part of a plea agreement.

He faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison for the conspiracy charge, five years for the bribery charge and up to three years for the false tax return. Siegmeister also agreed to forfeit almost \$520,000 and 7,372 shares of the Coca-Cola Company common stock, proceeds he obtained through his commission of the offenses, according to the DOJ.

Siegmeister was elected as state attorney for the Third Judicial Circuit in Florida from 2013 through 2019. The district covered Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwanee and Taylor counties.

Between November 2017 and May 2019, court documents show that Marion Michael O'Steen, a defense attorney who represented clients being prosecuted by Siegmeister's office, requested favorable disposition of charges filed against his clients and delayed official actions that allowed O'Steen to receive additional fees from at least one of his clients. Siegmeister solicited bribes from O'Steen in return.

Siegmeister trial: Judge: No counsel change needed for corruption trial involving ex-Lake City prosecutor

Siegmester license suspended: Florida Supreme Court holds north Florida ex-State Attorney Siegmester in contempt

Siegmester indicted: North Florida ex-State Attorney Siegmester indicted in federal extortion, bribery case

The plea agreement shows that in 2018 Siegmester sent O'Steen four photographs of bulls he was selling following the sentencing of one of the defense attorney's clients. The sale was in exchange for the favorable treatment provided to one of O'Steen's clients who was facing charges.

Siegmester later told O'Steen that he could defer another client through pre-trial intervention if O'Steen would purchase one of his bulls. O'Steen relayed the information to the client, asking for \$75,000 so that "everything goes away," the DOJ release says.

More: Feds: Elected Florida prosecutor stole nearly \$1 million, bribed defendants, attorneys

Siegmester also admitted to inflating expenses while serving as a guardian for a man, diverting more than \$500,000 in assets from the man's estate to Siegmester's own personal expenses between 2015 and 2016. He failed to report the funds on his taxes, according to the investigation from the FBI and IRS.