



[Tennessee state senator changing plea in campaign finance case](#) (Tennessee)

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (WREG) — Sen. Brian Kelsey filed a motion Thursday for a change of plea hearing in his federal campaign finance case.

Kelsey pleaded not guilty to the charges last November.

The filing in district court in Nashville comes nearly one year to the day after Kelsey was [indicted by a federal grand jury](#) in a campaign finance scheme, along with co-defendant Joshua Smith, a Nashville social club owner who ran a political action committee.

Smith entered a guilty plea in the case two weeks ago.

According to the Department of Justice, Kelsey, Smith, and others “allegedly orchestrated the concealed movement of \$91,000 to a national political organization for the purpose of funding advertisements that urged voters to support Kelsey in the August 2016 primary election, and that the conspirators caused the political organization to make \$80,000 worth of contributions to Kelsey’s federal campaign committee in the form of coordinated expenditures.”

Kelsey had previously [proclaimed his innocence](#), pleading not guilty last year and calling the case a “political witch hunt.”

“The Biden Administration is trying to take me out because I’m conservative and I’m the number one target of the Tennessee Democratic Party,” Kelsey said in October 2021.

Kelsey (R-Germantown) represents parts of east Shelby County and East Memphis in the Tennessee Senate. He announced in March he would not seek re-election.

His trial was scheduled to move forward in January 2023.

[DC Councilmember Silverman accused of misusing campaign funds, asked to resign](#) (District of Columbia)

WASHINGTON (7News) — At-Large D.C. Councilmember Elissa Silverman, running as an Independent, is on the hot seat. The Washington Post, not only has not endorsed her but has editorialized against her. Activist Ron Moten is leading a rally at the Wilson Building Tuesday calling on her to resign.

This comes after the D.C. Office of Campaign Finance accused her of misusing \$6,722 she collected for her own campaign but spent on two polls in the Ward 3 race in which she was not a candidate.

At issue is the Ward 3 Council primary race. The front runner in the race was former D.C. Budget Director Eric Goulet. But Silverman says he's the candidate of Washington's corporate and monied interests and she decided to endorse one of three other candidates running: Bob Bergman, Tricia Duncan, or Matt Frumin.

After the polls came out, she endorsed Frumin. The other two candidates dropped out and also endorsed Frumin, who ultimately won the primary race.

But was there illegal collusion between Silverman and the other candidates?

Silverman insists there wasn't, that the candidate's decisions did not involve her.

"I didn't show the poll to anyone outside my campaign," said Silverman.

Did she tell them about her polling?

"I told them I couldn't endorse them, based on a poll. I said, yeah, I don't think you have a shot of winning." Silverman said.

Eric Goulet, a Democratic Party moderate who had been the frontrunner in the Ward 3 race, says he doesn't believe there was no collusion.

Silverman has appealed the Office of Campaign Finance decision that she repay the money.

Goulet would like the US Attorney to look at the case, arguing that people can lie to the Campaign Finance office and get away with it.

Moten says he's holding the rally calling for Silverman to resign, "based on misconduct and breaking laws that affected an election."

[Former CT state Rep. Michael DiMassa faces possible prison, fine after pleading guilty to stealing about \\$1.2 million in pandemic relief money \(Connecticut\)](#)

Michael DiMassa, a former Democratic state Representative and West Haven political insider, pleaded guilty Tuesday to charges that he stole about \$1.2 million the city was awarded to cover expenses arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

As the pandemic reached Connecticut in late 2020, DiMassa was empowered by West Haven's mayor to approve spending for prevention measures and other unexpected costs. He admitted in court Monday that he conspired with his wife and two others to embezzle the federal grant money by creating dummy invoices and directing payments to sham companies.

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Federal prosecutors and FBI agents have said in court filings that DiMassa spent much of the stolen money at the Mohegan Sun Casino, where his purchases of tens of thousands of dollars in gambling chips correspond with illegal diversions from the COVID grants.

Before he was arrested and forced out of the state legislature, DiMassa held a variety of positions in West Haven's government. He was arrested in October 2021. John Bernardo, a political associate and fellow city employee, was charged a month later. DiMassa's wife, Lauren Knox DiMassa and his associate, John Trasacco, were charged in February.

The embezzlement came to the attention of federal law enforcement officials through Democratic infighting for control of West Haven's government. It resulted in greater state

review of city spending by West Haven, a city that has flirted with insolvency and been subject to state oversight for decades.

DiMassa and Bernardo were accused of creating a phony partnership, Compass Investment Group, and using it as a vehicle to steal about \$637,000.

Federal prosecutors said the two billed the city for a long list of services that included “as COVID-19 Legal + Lobbying + Site work for COVID-19 Clinic, Consulting Service-Legislative Review Executive Orders – COVID-19, Consulting Service-Support Staff Services, Monitors/Security Site (April 2021-May 2021), and Consulting Service Lobbying Service – COVID-19 Federal.” In reality, the indictment charges, the two did nothing for the city.

Bernardo is accused of getting about \$50,000. When he pleaded guilty to a fraud charge earlier this year, Bernardo blamed DiMassa and complained he didn't realize the extent of the theft until reading about it in the newspaper after his arrest.

“I had no idea what Mr. DiMassa was doing, how he was getting the money,” Bernardo said when he pleaded guilty. “When I heard it was between \$500,000 and \$800,000, I said, ‘What is going on here? Where is the money?’ ”

DiMassa's wife — they were married days before his arrest — also pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to commit fraud. Her lawyer said in court that, as was the case with Bernardo, she handed almost all the money she is accused of collecting, \$147,776.10, to her husband.

Federal prosecutors said the checks issued to Lauren DiMassa under the heading “Youth Violence COVID-19 Associated Expenses,” included charges for “in-home counseling, cleaning supplies, special needs hourly service, WIFI assistance for low/moderate income families, counseling services, license fees, a fall youth clinic, meals, support group supplies, equipment rental, and youth clinic support group.”

Lauren DiMassa is accused of cashing 16 checks, keeping a portion of the funds and depositing the rest in an account she controlled. During the period in which the fraud occurred, July 2020 to October 2021, prosecutors said she did nothing in return for the money.

The fourth defendant in the case, John Trasacco, is accused of creating two dummy corporations, L&H company and JIL Sanitation Services, that he and DiMassa allegedly used to bill West Haven about \$432,000 for non-existent COVID-related supplies and services. Among other things, federal prosecutors said the two billed the city for cleaning a school building that the indictment said “had been vacant and abandoned for years.”

Trasacco has pleaded not guilty and is awaiting trial.

[Tallahassee's lobbying code hangs on election outcome](#) (Florida)

During the past few years, Tallahassee's governance has come under federal scrutiny. Two former mayors, a local administrator and a local developer have faced corruption charges. Some have gone to prison. So the question of ethics is very much part of the current mayoral race. And it's yet another issue on which Mayor John Dailey and Leon County Commissioner Kristin Dozier disagree.

In 2014, city residents approved the creation of an Independent Ethics Board and other reforms. That was before they knew the FBI was investigating corruption at City Hall. Before former mayor Scott Maddox, his partner Paige Carter-Smith and developer J.T. Burnett went to prison. And before former mayor Andrew Gillum and his longtime associate Sharon Lettman-Hicks were indicted. Long before that, Ben Wilcox of Citizens for Ethics Reform was working to tighten the requirements for lobbying with the city.

*"Right now they're notoriously weak, and we saw in the federal public corruption trial that, for example, Paige Carter-Smith was being hired to lobby for a number of different companies, but she never registered as a lobbyist for the city of Tallahassee," Wilcox said. "That kind of unregistered lobbying is still going on to this day in the city of Tallahassee."*

The city did pass an enhanced ethics code in 2019. The Independent Ethics Board is responsible for maintaining a hotline for corruption and fraud, referring certain cases to law enforcement, and educating officials and staff in state and local ethics laws and code. But Peter Butzin of Citizens for Ethics Reform says until the city requires lobbyists to register, it is still in peril from bad actors.

*"The true influencers in Tallahassee will continue to say that they are consultants and not lobbyists," said Butzin. "We'll never see their list of clients. We'll never see their compensation. We will never see the targets of their influence or contacts with commissioners and staff."*

Dailey has often said he's proud of the city's ethics package.

*"Look, the city of Tallahassee has passed the strongest ethics reform package in the 198-year history of the city, and we have the strongest ethics reform package of any municipality in the state of Florida. I am very comfortable where we are, but if there's more work to be done, of course we will entertain any and all ideas as we move forward."*

Dailey said that in a recent candidate forum sponsored by WFSU, the Tallahassee Democrat and the League of Women Voters. Here's Dozier:

*"That's true. We've made good progress. But important recommendations from that board, such as expanding the definition of lobbyist -- yes, the city commission has heard that, but they have not moved forward on a majority of recommendations. You can look at their annual report and see the difference between what they accepted and what they didn't."*

Dailey said the city hasn't changed its definition of a lobbyist on the advice of attorneys, including the attorney for the joint city-county Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency.

*"Because the city attorney, the Blueprint attorney and the county attorney said that based on case law, it is easier to prosecute if you have a similar definition," he said.*

That prompted the moderators to ask why members of Citizens for Ethics Reform have continued pushing so hard on the city commission.

*"Well, I think you should ask those three individuals," Dailey said. "I can't speak for them."*

*Moderators: "Okay. Very good. Okay."*

The critics in question are Wilcox and Butzin, who regularly attend city commission meetings.

*"Now, I'll throw the county right back the same question: Why haven't they made the motion to change their definition of lobbyist where we could all move forward together?," Dailey asked.*

Wilcox says the city should be the first to change the definition of a lobbyist because its process is already underway. And here's Butzin speaking to commissioners on September 7, when the commission proposed changes to its own lobbying package:

*"As if you hadn't done enough to discourage people from registering as lobbyists, the proposed ordinance drives a stake in the heart of the registration requirements."*

That proposal from the city attorney would have banned people convicted of certain crimes -- such as bribery and misuse of public office -- from lobbying the city for 10 years. But it wouldn't have required lobbyists doing business with the city to disclose their activities. Here's Wilcox:

*"This does nothing to address the real problems facing the city of Tallahassee, which is that unregistered lobbyists -- or as I call them, "ghost lobbyists," are actively engaged in lobbying city government even as I speak. Because they choose to call themselves consultants rather than lobbyists allows them to operate out of public scrutiny, without disclosing who their clients are -- which they would actually have to do if they were registered as lobbyists."*

Why does this matter in the run-off for mayor? Because a Dozier victory would alter the commission majority on this question. So far Dailey has prevailed on keeping the status quo, supported by Mayor Pro Tem Curtis Richardson and Commissioner Dianne Williams-Cox. Commissioners Jeremy Matlow and Jack Porter favor lobbyist registration, as does Dozier.

*"We've got a lot of good work," Dozier said. "We can move very quickly and I think we need to, because this is at the heart of all the challenges we've had in recent years."*

Scott Maddox is serving time in Pensacola and Burnette in Montgomery, Alabama. Carter-Smith was released in July and remains on house arrest. Gillum and Lettman-Hicks are awaiting their federal trials.

