

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Friday, August 13, 2021

For more information, contact:

**U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Public Affairs  
202-514-2007**

**U.S. Attorney's Office  
Northern District of Florida  
850-216-3845  
[USAFLN.Press.Office@usdoj.gov](mailto:USAFLN.Press.Office@usdoj.gov)**

**JOHN THOMAS BURNETTE CONVICTED OF FIVE COUNTS**

**TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA** – A federal jury in Tallahassee has convicted John Thomas Burnette, 44, of Tallahassee, Florida of one count of Extortion Under Color of Official Right, two counts of Honest Services Fraud by Bribery, one count of Use of Interstate Commerce Facilities to Promote Bribery, and one count of Making False Statements to a Federal Officer. The guilty verdict was returned August 13, 2021, at the conclusion of a fifteen-day trial.

Acting United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, Jason R. Coody, Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, and Special Agent in Charge Rachel Rojas of the FBI's Jacksonville Field Office made the announcement.

In December 2018, a federal grand jury charged Tallahassee City Commissioner Scott Maddox and Paige Carter-Smith in a forty-four count indictment. In May 2019, a grand jury returned a superseding indictment adding Burnette as a defendant. Maddox and Carter-Smith subsequently pleaded guilty to two counts of Honest Services Fraud by Bribery and one count of Conspiring to Interfere with the Lawful Function of the IRS. In October 2019, a grand jury returned a second superseding indictment against Burnette.

At trial, the government presented evidence that Burnette engaged in a multi-year scheme with Maddox and Carter-Smith to commit extortion, fraud, and bribery. During the scheme, Burnette and Maddox extorted bribe payments from FBI undercover agents ("UCs") who were posing as real estate developers and entrepreneurs. Burnette instructed the UCs that to obtain preferential treatment, they must pay bribes to Maddox through Governance Services. Burnette, Maddox, Carter-Smith, and the UCs agreed that the UCs would pay Governance Services \$10,000 per month in exchange for Maddox agreeing to perform official acts meant to benefit the UCs' sham development company.

In 2017, FBI agents approached Burnette, identified themselves as FBI agents, and asked Burnette about his involvement in the bribe payments to Maddox. During the interview, Burnette repeatedly lied about his knowledge of the UCs' payments to and involvement with Maddox.

"Today's verdict affirms a multi-year investigation of public corruption in the City of Tallahassee," stated Acting U.S. Attorney Coody. "Our citizens deserve and expect that those in public office will act in the public's interest, rather than their own and that of their confederates. Those who

violate their oath and betray the public's trust will be the subject of this office and our law enforcement partners' unwavering efforts, which will continue beyond this verdict."

"Our citizens are entitled to decisions based on the best interests of the public, not the best interests of corrupt public officials and bribe-paying business owners seeking to line their own pocketbooks," said Rachel L. Rojas, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Jacksonville Division. "Let there be no doubt - bribes are not good business in Tallahassee, nor anywhere else. The FBI remains fully committed to ensuring that anyone who violates the public's trust is held accountable."

Burnette's sentencing hearing is scheduled for October 28, 2021, at 1:00 pm at the United States Courthouse in Tallahassee before the Honorable United States District Judge Robert L. Hinkle. Burnette faces maximum penalties of 20 years in prison for Counts Two, Five, and Six (the Extortion and Honest Services Fraud offenses) and 5 years for Counts Eight and Nine (the Use of Interstate Facilities to Promote Bribery and Making False Statements to a Federal Officer offenses).

Scott Maddox and Paige Carter-Smith's sentencing hearing is scheduled for September 9, 2021, at 10:00 am at the United States Courthouse in Tallahassee before the Honorable United States District Judge Robert L. Hinkle. Both Maddox and Smith face maximum penalties of 20 years in prison for the Honest Services Wire Fraud and Honest Services Mail Fraud offenses and 5 years in prison for the Conspiracy to Defraud the United States offense.

The conviction was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation. The case against Maddox and Carter-Smith was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Stephen M. Kunz, and Andrew J. Grogan of the Northern District of Florida, and Deputy Chief Peter M. Nothstein, and Trial Attorney Rosaleen T. O'Gara of the Department of Justice, Criminal Division's Public Integrity Section.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Florida is one of 94 offices that serve as the nation's principal litigators under the direction of the Attorney General. To access public court documents online, please visit the [U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida](https://www.uscourts.gov/court-locations/northern-district-of-florida) website. For more information about the United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Florida, visit <http://www.justice.gov/usao/fln/index.html>.

###