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## Police chief in Mass. accused of forcing donations

Thursday, August 8, 2013 -- The Associated Press

Local Coverage

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**Author(s):**

Associated Press

BOSTON — The police chief in the small western Massachusetts town of Lee used his rank to force people facing prostitution-related charges to donate to a holiday toy fund he ran, then withdrew the money for his own use, authorities said Thursday in announcing his federal indictment.

Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis was indicted Thursday on extortion and money laundering charges after a lengthy probe that included searches of the police headquarters as well as his home in Pittsfield.

Buffis is accused of extorting a \$4,000 donation from two people who were facing prostitution-related charges. Buffis also faces three counts of money laundering, U.S. District Attorney Carmen Ortiz said in a joint statement with state police superintendent Col. Timothy Alben and Berkshire District Attorney David Capeless.

They say Buffis used his title to extort the so-called donation in February 2012 to the Edward J. Lalilberte Toy Fund, which he controlled. Authorities allege he quickly withdrew almost all the money, putting it in a personal account he controlled with his wife and using it for his own expenses.

Buffis later lied to investigators about the use of the funds, prosecutors alleged.

"The alleged actions of Chief Buffis disgrace the many incredible law enforcement stewards who uphold and enforce the law," Ortiz said.

Buffis didn't immediately respond to an email or a call seeking comment.

Berkshire District Attorney Capeless said the accusations target only Buffis, not the Lee police department or any other member of its force.

Authorities say anyone else who made so-called donations to toy fund should contact the FBI.

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