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Lee Police Chief Indicted for Extortion and Money Laundering

*Alleged Activity Includes Coercing Payment from
Individuals Facing Prostitution Charges and Diverting
Money Through Children's Toy Fund*

U.S. Attorney's Office
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District of Massachusetts
(617) 748-3100

BOSTON—A federal grand jury in Springfield returned an indictment today against Lee Police Chief Joseph Buffis for extortion and three counts of money laundering.

It is alleged that in February 2012 Buffis, 55, of Pittsfield, acting in his official capacity as Lee Police Department chief, extorted a \$4,000 "donation" from two individuals who were facing prostitution-related charges. The "donation" was made payable to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, a holiday toy fund that Buffis controlled. Buffis deposited the \$4,000 check into the Toy Fund's bank account and quickly withdrew \$3,990, which he then deposited into a joint bank account that he operated with his wife. The diverted money was then used to pay for various personal expenses. Buffis is alleged to have lied to law enforcement about the disposition of the funds.

"To be entrusted to serve and protect is a great honor and privilege. The alleged actions of Chief Buffis disgrace the many incredible law enforcement stewards who uphold and enforce the law. Actions like these threaten the credibility of our justice system, and we will not stand idly by and allow the trust of our communities to be violated," said United States Attorney Carmen M. Ortiz.

Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless said, "The allegations contained in the federal indictment describe a serious breach of the public trust, and my office will continue to work with United States Attorney Ortiz and her office to see that justice is done and order restored. It should be made clear that these accusations are made against one man, Joseph Buffis, not the Lee Police Department or any other members of its force. My office will continue to work proudly alongside the Lee Police Department to ensure safety and justice in the town of Lee and throughout Berkshire County."

"This is another example of a successful investigation and extraordinary teamwork between the FBI, the Massachusetts State Police, the United States Attorney's Office, and the Berkshire District Attorney's Office. The conduct charged in this indictment demonstrates law enforcement's commitment to pursue public corruption at any level. We will not tolerate these acts, especially from those who have sworn to serve and protect the community and its citizens," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Vincent B. Lisi.

If convicted, Buffis faces a maximum of 20 years in prison on each of the counts followed by five years of supervised release, and \$250,000 fine. Buffis will be summoned to appear in court for his initial appearance.

U.S. Attorney Ortiz; District Attorney Capeless; FBI Special Agent in Charge Lisi; and Colonel Timothy P. Alben, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police, made the announcement today. The U.S. Attorney's Office would like to thank District Attorney Capeless and the Massachusetts State Police Berkshire Detective Unit for uncovering the alleged violations and initiating the investigation which led to today's indictment.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven H. Breslow of Ortiz's Springfield Branch Office.

We are seeking the public's assistance in this case. For those who have donated cash or toys to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund or for those who have applied to the Edward J. Laliberte Toy Fund, please contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Springfield Resident Agency, at (413) 732-0159. Please contact the FBI if you have any information, questions, or concerns regarding this matter.

The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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