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## Fla. Lawyer Found Guilty Of Extorting Client For Cash

By **Madison Arnold**

Law360 (June 21, 2022, 4:41 PM EDT) -- Former criminal defense attorney Marion Michael O'Steen was found guilty on two charges — interfering with commerce by extortion and failing to timely file a form required for receipt of more than \$10,000 — and faces up to 25 years in federal prison, the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Middle District of Florida announced Tuesday.

O'Steen, of Cross City, Florida, was acquitted on two other charges that his defense attorney says is related to the case of Jeffrey Siegmeister, a disgraced former Florida state attorney who pled guilty to bribery and extortion charges, and **agreed to surrender** his law license last month. O'Steen is set to be sentenced Oct. 12.

The two charges O'Steen was acquitted of included conspiracy to commit bribery and exportation, said Mitchell A. Stone, O'Steen's defense attorney. O'Steen plans to appeal the jury's decision to convict him, Stone said.

"We were very pleased with the jury verdict finding Mr. O'Steen not guilty of the main conspiracy counts that encompassed extortion and bribery because we felt that after cross-examining their main witness, the state attorney, it was in our view apparent that Mr. O'Steen had not conspired," Stone told Law360 Pulse in an interview Tuesday. "However, we respect the jury's verdict on the substantive count. We disagree that there was any extortion in our view."

The U.S. attorney's office said in its news release Tuesday that evidence during O'Steen's trial "established that O'Steen requested official acts from Siegmeister — including the favorable disposition of charges filed against his client, and the delay of official actions — in order to enable O'Steen to obtain additional 'fees' from at least one of his clients."

Stone said O'Steen was simply asking additional fees for the work he was doing, but O'Steen's client did not want to pay those fees and was stringing him along in the hopes O'Steen would continue doing legal work without getting paid.

"My client had to use some language that, unfortunately, was reported that suggested that he was demanding that money. In our view, there should never be extortion charges for an attorney demanding money from his client for work he is doing, even if the government does not believe that the work was extensive," Stone said.

Siegmeister served as the elected state attorney for the Third Judicial Circuit from January 2013 to December 2019, when he resigned. O'Steen represented clients being prosecuted by Siegmeister's office.

In August 2018, O'Steen told a client that if he paid an additional \$60,000 fee, O'Steen could then use a "favor" with the state attorney to make "everything go away." O'Steen told his client he could go to trial, but he didn't think the client could win and that the client would not get the same result with another attorney, the U.S. attorney's office said.

The U.S. attorney's office also said O'Steen received two payments of \$30,000 each from his client. O'Steen was found guilty of failing to timely fill out a Form 8300, which reports the receipt of more than \$10,000 in currency, with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network.

Siegmeister, of Live Oak, Florida, and O'Steen connected while working on opposite ends of the same cases. In one instance, Siegmeister solicited the sale of a bull from his farm in exchange for

favorable treatment of O'Steen's client, according to court documents from Siegmeister's case.

"Our position is, obviously, the jury verdict verified that the jury does not believe our client had conspired with Siegmeister to do anything illegal," Stone said.

Siegmeister lives on a farm in Suwannee County, where he and his wife raise bulls. In April 2018, Siegmeister sent O'Steen four photographs of bulls he was selling after the sentencing of one of O'Steen's clients, indicating O'Steen was expected to purchase a bull, according to court documents.

Siegmeister's office had charged that client with attempted first-degree murder, arson, possession of a firebomb and violation of a domestic violence injunction. The client threw multiple Molotov cocktails at 3 a.m. through the bedroom window of her estranged husband, according to Siegmeister's plea agreement.

An assistant state attorney had offered a five-year prison plea deal for the client in an email. O'Steen forwarded the message to Siegmeister, who responded he "would deal with it." That offer was later reduced to a 13-month prison sentence in which the client entered a "no contest" plea," according to court documents.

The U.S. Attorney's Office of the Middle District of Florida is represented by its own Kelly Karase and David B. Mesrobian.

O'Steen is represented by Mitchell A. Stone of Mitchell A. Stone PA, Ryan E. McFarland and William Mallory Kent of Kent & McFarland.

The case is USA v. Siegmeister et al., case number 3:21-cr-00016, in U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida.

--Editing by Lakshna Mehta.

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