

## Trump-Pardoned Democrat's Supreme Court Appeal Could Reshape U.S. Bribery Law

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Former Cincinnati City Council member P.G. Sittenfeld was granted a full and unconditional pardon by President Donald Trump on May 29, 2025, but continues to pursue his legal appeal despite the pardon. Now, he's taking his case to the United States Supreme Court not to clear his record, but to challenge how bribery laws are interpreted across the country.

In 2022, Sittenfeld was convicted of federal bribery and attempted extortion for accepting \$20,000 from undercover FBI agents posing as developers. Prosecutors alleged the funds were provided in exchange for his agreement to support a Cincinnati downtown

development project. Sittenfeld has long maintained his innocence, arguing that the money was a legal campaign donation protected by the First Amendment, not a bribe. A jury found otherwise and sentenced him to 16 months in prison. He served approximately four and a half months of his 16-month sentence before being released in May 2024 pending appeal, and later pardoned in May 2025.

Despite the pardon, Sittenfeld is continuing his appeal, something legal experts say is rare, if not unprecedented. His legal team contends the boundary between legal political contributions and illegal bribery is blurred, pointing to differing interpretations of the Supreme Court decisions in *McCormick v. United States* (1991) and *Evans v. United States* (1992). One requires clear evidence of a quid pro quo arrangement, while the other allows for conviction based solely on knowingly accepting a bribe.

Sittenfeld's appeal seeks clarity, not only for himself but for other public officials and donors navigating a complicated legal landscape. In a recent post, he wrote that his goal is to prevent "what happened to me" from deterring good people from public service or lawful political giving.

The Supreme Court's decision may also have implications for former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder, convicted in 2023 in a \$60 million bribery scheme involving utility company FirstEnergy. Both Sittenfeld and Householder had their appeals rejected by the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, but in both cases, the judges urged the Supreme Court to revisit the old rulings.

Legal scholars say this is a chance for the nation's highest court to clarify decades-old decisions and bring consistency to how bribery laws are applied, potentially rewriting the rules for political donations, public trust, and corruption cases across the United States.