

Larry Householder, Matt Borges corruption convictions upheld by federal appeals court

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COLUMBUS, Ohio—A federal appeals court has upheld the convictions of ex-Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder and former Ohio Republican Party Chair/lobbyist Matt Borges for their roles in the House Bill 6 bribery scandal.

In [an unsigned ruling](#) issued Tuesday, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously rejected [a wide array of arguments](#) made by Householder and Borges against their convictions.

However, one of the judges stated in a concurring opinion that the U.S. Supreme Court should revisit a 1992 ruling that underpins prosecutors' argument that Householder and Borges were engaging in an illegal bribery scheme, rather than protected free speech.

Householder, a Perry County Republican, [was sentenced in 2023 to 20 years in prison](#) for overseeing the passage of HB6, a 2019 state energy law, with the help of \$60 million-plus in bribe money from Akron-based utility FirstEnergy, which stood to profit enormously from the law.

Borges, a lobbyist for a FirstEnergy subsidiary, [was sentenced to 5 years](#) for his part in the bribery scheme, which centered on scuttling opposition to HB6.

Householder [appealed his conviction on several grounds](#), from claiming that the district court judge was biased to arguing the jury got faulty instructions. But the appeals court rejected each of his arguments.

"The evidence showed that Householder agreed to commit—and did commit—extortion and honest services fraud," the appeals court decision stated. "That is, he solicited and received millions of dollars from FirstEnergy in exchange for passing the bailout legislation and saving that bailout from a voter referendum."

Borges, meanwhile, [argued in his appeal](#) that, among other things, he wasn't aware that the pro-HB6 organization was engaged in illegal activity. The appeals court panel didn't agree.

"All told, Borges had a deep knowledge of (and involvement in) Householder's bribery scheme," the court held.

The Plain Dealer/cleveland.com has reached out to defense attorneys for Householder and Borges for comment, as well as to ask whether they intend to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The decision was issued by Sixth Circuit Judges Stephanie Davis, John Nalbandian, and Amul Thapar. Davis is an appointee of Democratic ex-President Joe Biden; Nalbandian and Thapar were appointed by Republican President Donald Trump.

In a concurring opinion, Thapar suggested that the U.S. Supreme Court should overturn its 1992 ruling in *Evans v. United States* that prosecutors used to establish that Householder's acceptance of the FirstEnergy money was illegal bribery.

That ruling, he wrote, unjustifiably broadened federal law to make it illegal for politicians who promise to take some sort of action to accept campaign contributions from people who support those promises. That criminalization of such a "routine political activity," he held, is "inconsistent with the Constitution's ironclad protection of political speech."

If the Supreme Court overturns that precedent, Thapar continued, "Householder's conviction may well fall," which in turn would move Borges' conviction to "shaky ground."

Scott Pullins, Householder's campaign attorney, said in a statement that it was a "sad and disappointing day" for Householder, Borges, and their families and supporters.

"But it is even a sadder day for constitutional free speech and the rule of law," Pullins continued, claiming that the federal government "singled out" Householder for prosecution.

Pullins noted that other recent Ohio House speakers – including current House Speaker Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican – raised money for dark-money groups that supported them and their political allies. He also noted that other state officials, such as Gov. Mike DeWine, then-Lt. Gov. (and now U.S. Sen.) Jon Husted, and then-Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof backed HB6 and got undisclosed corporate donations from FirstEnergy.

None of those politicians have been accused of any wrongdoing, nor have there been specific accusations that any of them engaged in a quid pro quo, in which they accepted campaign contributions in exchange for backing HB6 or any other proposal.