

Trump pardons former Ohio politician convicted in bribery case

By Jeremy Pelzer
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COLUMBUS, Ohio — PG Sittenfeld, a former Cincinnati City Council member and 2016 Democratic U.S. Senate candidate convicted of federal corruption charges in 2023, has been pardoned by President Donald Trump.

Sittenfeld's "full and unconditional pardon," signed by Trump on Wednesday and [posted online Thursday](#) by the U.S. Justice Department, raises the question of whether Trump might soon also pardon another former Ohio public official behind bars for corruption: former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder.

Sittenfeld began a 16-month prison sentence in January 2024, following his conviction the previous year on charges that he accepted \$20,000 in bribes to his political action committee from undercover FBI agents in exchange for guaranteeing City Council votes for a Cincinnati development project.

He was freed a few months later as he appealed his conviction, arguing – among other things – that accepting the political contribution was protected by his First Amendment rights.

A federal appeals court panel upheld his conviction last February, though the judges stated that it "may be time" for the Supreme Court to "revisit or refine" the court precedents that prosecutors relied on to secure Sittenfeld's guilty verdict.

Sittenfeld's attorneys have since appealed again to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Plain Dealer/cleveland.com has reached out to Sittenfeld's attorney and the U.S. Justice Department for comment.

Sittenfeld, 40, was once considered a rising star within the Ohio Democratic Party, winning some statewide attention when he unsuccessfully challenged ex-Gov. Ted Strickland for the 2016 Democratic U.S. Senate nomination. At the time of his arrest, Sittenfeld was [planning to run for Cincinnati mayor in 2021](#).

Sittenfeld was one of 25 people pardoned by Trump on Wednesday, [according to the Justice Department's website](#). Others on the list include ex-U.S. Rep. Michael Grimm,

a New York Republican convicted of tax evasion, and former Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland, a Republican convicted of election fraud and obstruction of justice in 2014.

It remains to be seen whether Sittenfeld's pardon will have any ramifications for ex-Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder, a Perry County Republican [who's serving a 20-year federal prison sentence](#) for overseeing a \$60 million bribery scheme to pass House Bill 6, a 2019 energy law.

Householder, who [met with the same FBI agents that met with Sittenfeld, using the same cover story](#), has [been preparing to ask Trump for clemency](#).

Matt Borges, a former Ohio Republican Party chair turned lobbyist, is also [serving a 5-year sentence](#) for his role in the HB6 scandal.

Neither Householder nor Borges were pardoned Wednesday along with Sittenfeld. Even if Trump grants Householder's clemency request, Householder would still [face pending state-level charges](#) that he illegally used campaign funds to pay legal fees in his federal case.

The Plain Dealer/cleveland.com has reached out to Householder's defense attorney for comment. Scott Pullins, Householder's campaign attorney, stated Thursday that he couldn't comment on the status of Householder's pardon request.

However, Pullins said he was "happy" that [Trump recently named Ed Martin](#), a former Missouri Republican Party chair, the Justice Department's new pardon attorney and put him in charge of a newly formed department group to examine the "weaponization" of the Justice Department by critics of the president.

Pullins indicated that Martin's stated mission to rectify politically motivated prosecutions from the past could work in Householder's favor. While Sittenfeld and Householder were each charged by the office of then-U.S. Attorney David DeVillers, appointed by Trump during his first term, Pullins said DeVillers made the decision himself to prosecute Householder without consulting the White House.

Pullins also pointed out that Martin was [a vocal defender](#) of people arrested for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021 pro-Trump riot at the U.S. Capitol, who are sometimes nicknamed "J6ers."

“The group of J6ers, as a whole, are huge fans of Ed Martin, and that group, as a whole, are huge fans of Larry Householder,” Pullins said. “I know that anyone that can talk to (Martin) and others from that community is probably going to be doing it.”