September 18, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- Lee, Mass., police chief charged with federal white collar crimes

Article provided by Murphy & Vander Salm LLP Visit us at http://www.mvsllp.com

In early August 2013, a Springfield grand jury issued a criminal indictment for the 55-year-old police chief of the small town of Lee, situated in the far western part of the commonwealth. Joseph Buffis had been on the Lee force for more than three decades and chief for two years. After a long investigation jointly conducted by federal and state law enforcement officials, Buffis was accused of the federal crimes of extortion and three counts of money laundering.

Broadly, extortion occurs when a public official corruptly extracts money or property from someone by threatening otherwise to reveal evidence that the victim committed a crime or other damaging information.

The crime of money laundering is committed when a person tries to disguise the nature of illegally obtained money by passing it through legitimate accounts or other channels, diluting it into the legitimate flow of money. Federal money laundering statutes are broad and detailed, criminalizing many different situations.

The details

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts released a press release about the matter. Specifically, Buffis allegedly extorted money for a charitable fund he ran from a Lee couple threatened with potential prostitution-related charges. The indictment alleges further that the chief deposited the $4,000 check into the charity's account and withdrew almost all of it for deposit into his own marital account, after which the money was used for personal expenditures.

The press release emphasizes that the allegations are only against the chief and not against the Lee police department or anyone else on it. Buffis' defense attorney has denied in the media any wrongdoing on the defendant's behalf and in late August, he reportedly pleaded not guilty to the federal charges.

Unfortunately for the police chief, he lost his job with the town after the indictment because of different allegations of fraudulently billing the city for a personal phone plan. The Boston Business Journal reports that according to Buffis' criminal defense lawyer, Buffis claims the phone plan was part of his compensation package.

Never arrested for either matter, he is free on an unsecured bond and scheduled to be back in federal court in early December for pretrial matters.

According to the press release, if convicted, the defendant could get up to 20 years imprisonment for each count, five years' supervised release after that and a $250,000 fine.

What is white collar crime?

White collar crimes are generally those that do not involve physical violence, but rather some type of fraud or other wrongdoing involving money or property like those alleged in the Buffis case. Other examples include embezzlement, bank fraud, identity theft, tax fraud and other similar offenses.

In addition to criminal penalties, those convicted of federal or state white collar crimes can face other negative consequences like civil fines, seizure of accounts to satisfy judgments, loss of professional licenses and employment, and serious damage to reputation.

White collar criminal defense

Anyone in Massachusetts being investigated, facing a federal grand jury or already charged with federal or state white collar crime should seek the advice and representation of an experienced Massachusetts criminal defense attorney. Having legal counsel at the investigation stage allows the lawyer to fight to protect the defendant's rights during the probe, but even if the matter has progressed, an attorney should be consulted to mount a vigorous criminal defense. The criminal penalties for a white collar crime conviction can be devastating and should not be taken lightly.