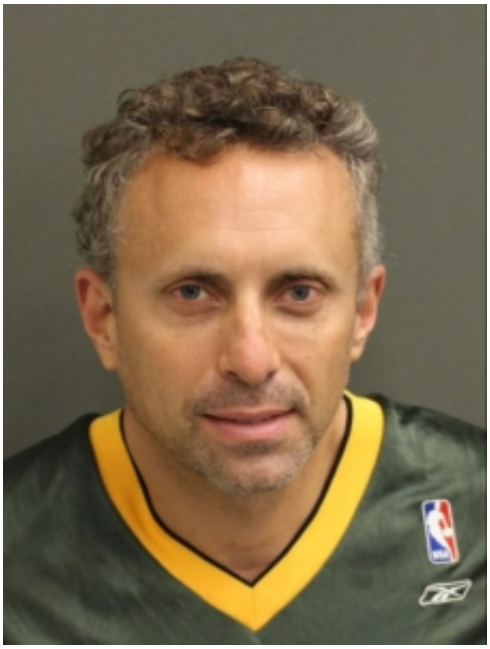
Charges against Seth Carey dismissed; attorney rebukes state police for 'rotten' investigation

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PARIS — Sex crime charges have been dropped against a suspended Rumford lawyer and one-time candidate for district attorney.



Seth Carey *2021 Orange County (Florida) Jail photo*

Seth Thomas Carey, 48, pleaded guilty in 8th District Court in Lewiston in May to a single misdemeanor count of assault. Carey was sentenced Wednesday on that charge to a $300 fine, the minimum mandatory sanction for that crime.

Charges pending since his arrest in 2021 in Florida were two felonies — attempted gross sexual assault and attempted aggravated sex trafficking — and three misdemeanors, unlawful sexual contact, domestic assault and engaging in prostitution.

All of those charges from a grand jury indictment were dismissed by a Hancock County prosecutor.

It was not immediately clear what prompted Hancock County Assistant District Attorney Heather Staples to drop the charges. Staples did not respond to questions about the decision on Wednesday.

The case against Carey had been transferred out of Prosecutorial District 3 — Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford counties — to avoid possible conflicts of interest because Carey had been a candidate for district attorney in District 3 in 2018.

Once the sentencing hearing was over Wednesday, Carey's attorney, James Howaniec, unleashed a blistering rebuke of the Maine State Police who had pursued charges against his client.

"In bringing these charges in the first place, the Maine State Police has engaged in an outrageous abuse of government power," Howaniec wrote. "Seth lost his law license and livelihood because of these obviously bogus allegations. His law license should be returned to him immediately.

"After Seth lost his license because of these false charges, the Maine State Police waited three years to bring a multicount felony sexual assault indictment against him," Howaniec continued. "The complaint was filed at a time when Seth was trying to get his license back and was again hoping to run for the office of district attorney.

"Despite no history of criminal behavior, Seth was arrested in Florida face down in a Walmart parking lot by six federal U.S. marshals with their rifles drawn. He was then allowed to sit in a Florida county jail for nine days before being extradited to Maine by two Maine State Police detectives. The Maine State Police issued a press release thanking multiple federal and state law enforcement agencies in Florida, as though Seth were some sort of dangerous violent predator that had been apprehended. It was a complete dog and pony show by the Maine State Police. After the damage was done, the so-called violent predator was then released on a low cash bail," Howaniec wrote.

Carey had won the Republican nomination in June 2018, but lost in the general election that November to incumbent District Attorney Andrew Robinson.

In 2019, Carey was charged with practicing law without a license, but he was never convicted.

The Maine Department of Secretary of State rejected Carey's attempted candidacy for district attorney in 2022 because his law license was under suspension and he hadn't registered in a political party, which barred him from being on the June primary

ballot.

The charges against him stemmed from a complaint lodged by a woman who reported in 2018 that Carey had sexually assaulted her when she was renting a room at his Rumford home. The woman had met Carey after she responded to him on a dating website and they had engaged in a sexual relationship.

The woman later accused Carey of sexual assault and secured a protection from abuse order against him.

Carey has always maintained his innocence.

According to witnesses, the same woman approached Carey in May 2021 after a soccer game in Rumford and screamed at him that she would shoot him if he ever got near her children again. The two children were apparently playing in the game, though Carey said he never knew that.

Carey later sought and was granted a protection from abuse order against the woman.

Howaniec, in his release, disputed the facts as they were presented by state police investigators.

"Starting in 2016," Howaniec wrote, "Seth was in a relationship with the alleged victim. It was the alleged victim who approached Seth on a dating site, seeking a sexual relationship. When Seth sought to terminate the relationship after a year and asked her to leave his house, she filed a complaint against him, alleging conduct dating back to 2016. He was prevented from returning to his own home in Rumford. She had never previously raised any concerns about the relationship to anyone until he asked her to leave."

The Maine Board of Overseers of the Bar had brought a five-count complaint — but later dropped one of the counts — against Carey in 2018 that resulted in a three-year suspension of his license based, in part, on the woman's accusations.

Carey's license had been suspended three times before that.

Since then, Carey has unsuccessfully sought to have his license to practice law in Maine reinstated, first by appealing to the Board of Overseers of the Bar and later to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court.

In June, the full court ruled to deny Carey's reinstatement after he had appealed a ruling by a single justice on that court who rejected his effort.

Howaniec said the long legal battle has had a negative impact on Carey's life. The attorney said he intends to call for a state investigation into the matter.

"Having lost his law license, and with felony sexual assault charges pending against him, Seth has struggled to find employment. It has been a Kafkaesque nightmare for Seth and his family that has lasted over five years, all due to the disgraceful abuse of government power by the Maine State Police. The state has now dismissed the indictment in its entirety, after completely devastating the life of Seth Carey and his family over the past five years. It is now obviously way too little, too late," Howaniec said.

"The irreparable damage to the Carey family has been done," Howaniec wrote. "We are grateful for Hancock County Assistant District Attorney Heather Staples for having the courage to step forward and dismiss these ridiculous charges. I am calling on the U.S. Attorney's Office to conduct an investigation into the behavior of Maine law enforcement in this outrageous case."

State Police have responded to Howaniec's accusations with the following statement:

"The Maine State Police takes all reports of domestic violence very seriously," said William Ross, Colonel of the Maine State Police. "The detectives in this case worked diligently interviewing both parties while continuing to gather evidence which included digital media. Because Carey had been attorney with clients, the court ordered the Maine State Police to furnish all digital evidence to an independent and objective filter team to review the digital media in order to filter evidence from his seized digital media that may have been privileged information. That filter team took approximately 18 months to complete their review of evidence. It's important to note that this case was also taking place during COVID restrictions and professionals working remotely.

"As the investigation neared completion," Ross wrote, "the case was brought by the District Attorney for review by the Grand Jury for review of felony charges based on the investigative evidence. When those charges were brought by a duly impaneled grand jury, the Maine State Police obtained a warrant for arrest in order to secure Carey and bring him back to Maine since he was living in Florida in the spring of 2021. The case has been with the courts since that time. The defendant pleaded

guilty to assault in exchange for dismissal of the other felony counts. We are disappointed that the Sun Journal did not reach out to us for comment despite the disparaging and frankly egregious claims made by Seth Carey's Attorney."

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