

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA
SPARTANBURG DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

vs.

CHARLES WRIGHT,
AMOS DURHAM, and
LAWSON B. WATSON

Defendants.

) CRIMINAL NO. 7:25cr1143
) 18 U.S.C. § 1349
) 18 U.S.C. § 371
) 18 U.S.C. § 666(a)(1)(A)
) 18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C)
) 21 U.S.C. § 843(a)(3)
) 21 U.S.C. § 853
) 21 U.S.C. § 881
) 28 U.S.C. § 2461(c)
)
)
)
) **INFORMATION**

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHARGES:

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

At all times material to this Information:

1. Defendant, CHARLES WRIGHT was Sheriff for the County of Spartanburg, in the State of South Carolina, having been elected in 2004 and re-elected until 2025. The Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) serves Spartanburg County.

2. As Sheriff, CHARLES WRIGHT was responsible for the operation and management of the Sheriff's Office. CHARLES WRIGHT supervised approximately 370 employees. The law enforcement officers were at-will employees, and the non-sworn employees were not at-will employees.

3. The Sheriff's Office received federal funding in excess of \$10,000 during each year of CHARLES WRIGHT's time in office, including calendar years 2017 through 2025. These federal funds stemmed from various federal grants, including grants from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program and the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration. These federal funds were awarded to the Sheriff's Office for official purposes and were restricted to spending on law enforcement activities.

4. Using public funds to finance his private lifestyle, CHARLES WRIGHT abused his position as elected Sheriff of Spartanburg County to siphon money from Spartanburg County.

5. The Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office Chaplain's Benevolence Fund (the Benevolence Fund)¹ is a non-profit organization that provides financial and emotional assistance to officers of the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office during times of need, such as bereavement, financial difficulties, and traumatic line-of-duty events. CHARLES WRIGHT hired the Defendant, AMOS DURHAM, as the Director of the Benevolence Fund. As Director of the Benevolence Fund, AMOS DURHAM was responsible for administering the fund. AMOS DURHAM abused his position to personally siphon public funds for his and CHARLES WRIGHT'S private use. The Benevolence Fund has a bank account at Truist Bank, with an account number ending in X8096.

6. The Spartanburg County Foundation ("Foundation") is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization that partners with individuals, families, businesses and corporations, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and professional advisors for the benefit of Spartanburg County residents. The Foundation manages, preserves, protects and grows over 1,100 philanthropic funds for individuals, families, nonprofit organizations and community groups. The Foundation administered the Benevolence Fund. The Foundation has a bank account at Wells Fargo Bank, with an account number ending in X0178. The funds donated to the Sheriff's Office were supposed to be deposited into the Foundation for tax exemption purposes, but in practice, many times the donations would be deposited directly into the Benevolence Fund bank account.

¹ The Benevolence Fund is also referred to as the "Spartanburg Co Chaplain Benevolent Fund."

7. LAWSON B. WATSON (“WATSON”), known to the United States Attorney, is an employee of Spartanburg County and/or the Spartanburg County Sheriff’s Office. CHARLES WRIGHT hired WATSON. WATSON used his position to personally enrich himself by receiving public funds for work that he did not perform.

COUNT 1
(CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT THEFT CONCERNING
PROGRAMS RECEIVING FEDERAL FUNDS)

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY FURTHER CHARGES:

8. Paragraphs 1-7 of the General Allegations section of this Information are re-alleged and incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth herein.

9. At times unknown, but beginning in at least in or around 2017, and continuing thereafter, up to and including the date of this Information, in the District of South Carolina and elsewhere, Defendants CHARLES WRIGHT and AMOS DURHAM, and others known and unknown to the United States Attorney, did knowingly and willfully, that is, with the intent to further the objects of the conspiracy, combine, conspire, confederate, and agree with each other and with others known and unknown to commit offenses against the United States, that is:

a. Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT, being elected Sheriff of Spartanburg County, together with and aided and abetted by Defendant AMOS DURHAM, being Director of the Spartanburg County Chaplain Benevolence Fund, both agents of the Spartanburg County Sheriff’s Office, said Sheriff’s Office receiving in each one-year period of 2017 through 2025, benefits in excess of \$10,000 under various Federal programs providing grants and assistance, embezzled, stole, obtained by fraud, and knowingly converted to the use of any person other than the rightful owner, and intentionally misapplied property worth at least \$5,000 or more

under the care, custody, and control of the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office; All in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 666(a)(1)(A), (b) and 2.

PURPOSE OF THE CONSPIRACY

10. It was a purpose of the conspiracy for Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT and Defendant AMOS DURHAM and their coconspirators to unlawfully enrich themselves by exploiting and abusing their positions of public trust to, among other things, embezzle, steal, and obtain money and property by fraud.

MANNER AND MEANS

11. The manner and means by which the defendants and their coconspirators sought to accomplish the objects and purpose of the conspiracy included, but were not limited to, the following:

12. It was part of the scheme and artifice to defraud that the coconspirators used funds from the Benevolence Fund to enrich themselves by siphoning money from the Benevolence Fund for the purchase of personal items such as travel, food, clothing, controlled substances, and other items.

13. It was part of the scheme and artifice that the coconspirators monitored the accounts of the Benevolence Fund so that they could embezzle, steal, and obtain property under the care of the Sheriff's Office without the County or County employees' knowledge.

14. It was part of the scheme and artifice that the coconspirators used blank checks to pay unindicted coconspirators for the purchase of controlled substances.

15. It was part of the scheme and artifice that the coconspirators managed and coordinated the subsequent sharing and intermingling of stolen funds through electronic communications, including telephone, email, and various instant messaging systems.

OVERT ACTS

16. In furtherance of the conspiracy, and to accomplish its objects and purposes, at least one coconspirator committed and caused to be committed, in the District of South Carolina, at least one of the following overt acts, among others:

17. On or about August 29, 2014, AMOS DURHAM executed signature cards related to the Benevolence Fund at Truist Bank, account ending in X8096.

18. From on or about August 2022 through on or about March 2025, AMOS DURHAM obtained funds from ATM withdrawals from the Benevolence Fund in the amount of approximately \$28,240 that was used to enrich himself and CHARLES WRIGHT.

19. From on or about May 9, 2023, through on or about May 20, 2023, CHARLES WRIGHT used money from the Benevolence Fund under the false pretense of paying for deputy expenses on a trip to Washington D.C. to honor a murdered Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office deputy. In truth and in fact, CHARLES WRIGHT used the funds for his own personal benefit and for the benefit of others.

20. From on or about January 2024, through on or about December 2024, CHARLES WRIGHT used money from the Benevolence Fund under the false pretense of paying a confidential informant for a criminal case.

21. From on or about January 2022, through on or about March 2025, CHARLES WRIGHT, met with an unindicted coconspirator and used money that he obtained from AMOS DURHAM from the Benevolence Fund to buy controlled substances for his personal use.

22. From on or about January 2022, through on or about March 2025, an unindicted coconspirator supplied CHARLES WRIGHT with prescription pills in exchange for money.

23. On or about September 19, 2024, CHARLES WRIGHT obtained a blank check

from AMOS DURHAM from the checking account of the Benevolence Fund, and CHARLES WRIGHT wrote the name of the unindicted coconspirator as payee during the time CHARLES WRIGHT was buying large quantities of controlled substances.

All in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371.

COUNT 2
(WIRE FRAUD CONSPIRACY)

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY FURTHER CHARGES:

24. Paragraphs 1-7 of the General Allegations section of this Information are re-alleged and incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth herein.

25. At times unknown, but beginning in or around January 2021, and continuing thereafter, up to and including February 14, 2025, in the District of South Carolina and elsewhere, Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT, and others known and unknown to the United States Attorney, did knowingly and willfully, that is with the intent to further the objects of the conspiracy, combine, conspire, confederate, and agree with each other to knowingly execute and attempt to execute a scheme and artifice to defraud, and to obtain money and property by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises, and to transmit and cause to be transmitted in interstate commerce, by means of wire communications, writings, signs, signals, pictures, and sounds, for the purpose of executing the scheme and artifice to defraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

PURPOSE OF THE CONSPIRACY

26. It was the purpose of the conspiracy for the Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT and others known and unknown to the United States Attorney to unlawfully enrich themselves by means of false and fraudulent pretenses, representations and promises to misappropriate funds from the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office.

MANNER AND MEANS

27. The manner and means by which the defendants sought to accomplish the object of the fraudulent scheme and artifice to defraud included, but was not limited to, the following:

28. In or about March 30, 2005, CHARLES WRIGHT hired WATSON a person known to the United States Attorney as an employee of the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office.

29. From at least as early as January 2021 through March 2025, WATSON declared, certified, and attested on his timesheet that he worked a number of hours to collect a paycheck as a full-time employee. In truth and in fact, WATSON received public funds and benefits for work that he did not perform.

30. From at least as early as January 2021 through February 2025, WATSON having previously agreed not to work a second job in Spartanburg County during regular business hours worked at his business in Spartanburg County during regular business hours.

31. From at least as early as January 2021 through February 2025, CHARLES WRIGHT allowed WATSON to continue to fraudulently receive a paycheck and benefits of approximately \$200,000 for work that he did not perform.

32. On Thursday, September 22, 2022, a domestic incident occurred around 4:30 PM between WATSON and another individual. Police responded to the scene, WATSON's home residence. WATSON declared, certified, and attested on his timesheet that he worked 7.5 hours on September 22, 2022. WATSON did not appear for work as part of a plan to obtain money for work that he did not perform.

All in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1349.

COUNT 3
(OBTAINING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES BY MISREPRESENTATION)

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY FURTHER CHARGES:

33. Paragraphs 1-7 of the General Allegations section of this Information are re-alleged and incorporated herein by reference as though fully set forth herein.

34. From in or about May of 2023 and continuing through in or about September 2023, in the District of South Carolina and elsewhere, Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT knowingly and intentionally obtained and acquired controlled substances, to wit, oxycodone and hydrocodone, Schedule II narcotics, by misrepresentation, fraud, deception, and subterfuge, and aided and abetted the same: to wit, Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT obtained 147 pain pills from an individual, known to the United States Attorney, after representing that the pills would be turned in and destroyed as part of the “take back” narcotic disposal program administered by the Spartanburg County Sheriff’s Office, when in truth and in fact, Defendant CHARLES WRIGHT was obtaining the controlled substance for his own personal use.

All in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 843(a)(3) and Title 18, United States Code, Section 2.

FORFEITURE**THEFT OF FEDERAL FUNDS/FRAUD/CONSPIRACY:**

Upon conviction to violate Title 18, United States Code, Sections 371 (conspiracy to violate 18 U.S.C. § 666) and 1349 (conspiracy to violate 18 U.S.C. § 1343) as charged in this Information, the Defendants, CHARLES WRIGHT, AMOS DURHAM, and LAWSON B. WATSON shall forfeit to the United States any property, real or personal, constituting, derived from or traceable to proceeds the Defendants obtained directly or indirectly as a result of such offenses.

DRUG OFFENSE:

Upon conviction for felony violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 843 as charged in this Information, the Defendant, CHARLES WRIGHT, shall forfeit to the United States all of the Defendant's rights, title, and interest in and to any property, real and personal,

- (a) constituting, or derived from any proceeds the Defendant obtained, directly or indirectly, as the result of such violation(s) of Title 21, United States Code, and all property traceable to such property;
- (b) used or intended to be used, in any manner or part, to commit or to facilitate the commission of such violations of Title 21, United States Code.

PROPERTY:

Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 981(a)(1)(C), Title 21, United States Code, Sections 853 and 881, and Title 28, United States Code, Section 2461(c), the property subject to forfeiture includes, but is not limited to, the following:

A. **Proceeds/Forfeiture Judgment:**

A sum of money equal to all proceeds the Defendants obtained directly or indirectly as the result of the offenses charged in this Information, that is, a minimum of \$270,000 in United States currency and all interest and proceeds traceable thereto, and/or such sum that equals all property derived

from or traceable to their violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 371, 666, 1343 and 1349.

B. Drug Proceeds/Forfeiture Judgment:

A sum of money equal to all property the Defendant obtained as a result of the drug offense charged in the Information and all interest and proceeds traceable thereto as a result of his violation of 21 U.S.C. § 843.

SUBSTITUTION OF ASSETS:

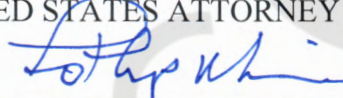
If any of the property described above as being subject to forfeiture, as a result of any act or omission of a Defendant:

- (a) cannot be located upon the exercise of due diligence;
- (b) has been transferred or sold to, or deposited with, a third person;
- (c) has been placed beyond the jurisdiction of the Court;
- (d) has been substantially diminished in value; or
- (e) has been commingled with other property which cannot be subdivided without difficulty;

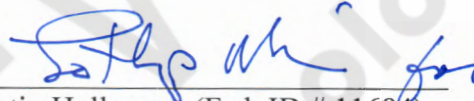
it is the intention of the United States, pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 982(b)(1), incorporating Title 21, United States Code, Section 853(p), to seek forfeiture of any other property of the Defendant up to the value of the forfeitable property.

Pursuant to Title 18, United States Code, Section 981(a)(1)(C), Title 21, United States Code, Sections 853 and 881, and Title 28, United States Code, Section 2461(c),

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