

Joel Greenberg stalking victim demands state to review former tax collector's case

WKMG / ClickOrlando.com - July 19, 2021

SEMINOLE COUNTY, Fla. – As Seminole County's former tax collector awaits sentencing on federal charges including child sex trafficking and stalking a political rival, one of Joel Greenberg's victims is demanding an outside review into how state and local authorities initially investigated the elected official.

Brian Beute, a music teacher who filed papers to run for tax collector against Greenberg in the 2020 election, was the target of a political smear campaign that Greenberg now admits to orchestrating.

"I just find that rather odd that what had happened in this county over four years not only slipped through the cracks but also still continues to be ignored," Beute said. "There are way too many questions and not enough answers."

Most of the crimes Greenberg recently pleaded guilty to committing were first uncovered by federal investigators with the U.S. Department of Justice rather than state or local authorities.

Beute, a self-described lifelong Republican, is urging Gov. Ron DeSantis to launch a "post-mortem" type review into how state officials handled complaints about Greenberg after he took office in 2017 and whether Greenberg's crimes could have potentially been uncovered sooner.

“Gov. Ron DeSantis has the authority to initiate an investigation,” Beute said. “It’s a win-win for everyone, including himself.”

Beute said DeSantis’ scheduling office has not yet arranged a meeting requested by Beute to share his concerns.

Representatives from DeSantis’s office did not respond to multiple emails from News 6 seeking comment for this story and have not publicly announced any plans to review the Greenberg case.

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody, the state’s top prosecutor, also did not commit to an outside probe like the kind Beute desires. Her office was never involved in any aspect of the Greenberg investigation or prosecution.

“You would have to ask the specific individual investigatory agency,” Moody told News 6 in response to questions about the Greenberg case.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES INVESTIGATE LETTER TIED TO GREENBERG

Less than a week after Beute entered the race to challenge Greenberg in October 2019, an anonymous letter arrived at Beute’s private school accusing the teacher of having a sexual relationship with a student.

“I’m educating other people’s children, and (I’m) accused of something like that?” Beute said. “I have daughters, so I have to explain this to them.”

Beute, a co-founder of the organization Save Rural Seminole, said he had previously been subjected to harassment related to his work preserving county land from development. He assumed the letter sent to his school was also politically motivated.

“It’s an attempt to undermine the integrity of the 2020 local election,” David Bear said, an attorney who met Beute through Save Rural Seminole.

According to Bear, investigators with the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office quickly determined that the allegations against Beute in the letter were unfounded.

The agency later discovered fingerprints on the letter and envelope belonged to Greenberg. Detectives also found evidence that phony Facebook and Twitter accounts used to spread false accusations about the teacher was created at Greenberg’s home.

Greenberg pleaded guilty in May to stalking Beute. In the detailed plea agreement, Greenberg admitted to sending the letter and setting up the social media accounts.

“I have nothing but good things say about the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office and how they handled this,” Bear said.

After identifying Greenberg as the source of the letter and social media accounts, the state attorney for Seminole and Brevard counties said the U.S. Attorney’s Office requested that the local investigation be suspended and the evidence turned over to the FBI so that it would not interfere with an ongoing federal investigation.

“It is a well-established and common practice for local and state criminal investigations and prosecutions to be deferred when a duplicate or concurrent federal investigation or

prosecution of a defendant has been undertaken,” Todd Brown said, a spokesperson for 18th Judicial Circuit State Attorney Phil Archer. “Often federal offenses carry more severe penalties and allow for far-reaching investigations into offenses that cross or extend beyond local and state jurisdictional boundaries.”

COMPLAINTS AGAINST GREENBERG SURFACED SHORTLY AFTER TAKING OFFICE

The federal government’s probe into Greenberg’s financial dealings at the tax collector’s office was underway as early as April 2019, court records show, about six months before Greenberg’s letter arrived at Beute’s school.

But Greenberg became the subject of controversy and complaints shortly after he took office as tax collector in January 2017.

Greenberg announced in June 2017 that his employees could **openly carry guns**, a move former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi later said in an opinion was improper.

Six months later, a motorist complained that Greenberg had attempted to stop her for speeding by using white lights on his vehicle and displaying a tax collector badge.

Although the chief assistant state attorney concluded that it was inappropriate for Greenberg to wear his badge during the encounter, she determined that the tax collector did not violate Florida law, which prohibits someone acting like a police officer while falsely pretending to be one.

“The incident involving Mr. Greenberg’s alleged impersonation of a law enforcement officer was thoroughly investigated by the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office and clearly established as not being a criminal offense,” the state attorney spokesperson said.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement was alerted to several accusations against Greenberg in 2017 and 2018, according to the [Orlando Sentinel](#) but no criminal charges were filed.

“FDLE didn’t investigate the same allegations that the FBI investigated, and Joel Greenberg hasn’t been subsequently charged with the allegations we investigated,” an FDLE spokesperson said. “We stand behind our investigations.”

The Florida Department of Revenue, which provides oversight and assistance to local tax collectors, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

After [Greenberg’s arrest](#) in June 2020, an audit of the Seminole County tax collector’s office concluded that Greenberg had misspent millions of tax dollars while in office.

Beute believes the governor should request an outside review of all prior allegations against Greenberg to evaluate how authorities addressed them.

“This is an opportunity for [DeSantis] to reiterate to all Floridians that he indeed is a law and enforcement executive,” Beute said.

The teacher’s attorney agrees.

“You don’t want to play Monday morning quarterback too much,” Bear said. “I don’t think it’s a stretch to say that there should be sort of a post-mortem [investigation] on why [the state] didn’t look into this more and didn’t use this as entrée to catching all the crazy criminal corruption that we now have confirmed was indeed going on.”