

Friday, October 2, 2026

KushMedia

Georgia's Cannabis Bribery Scandal: Three Licensing Officials Sentenced, One Cooperating Witness Still Talking — and the Investigation That Isn't Over

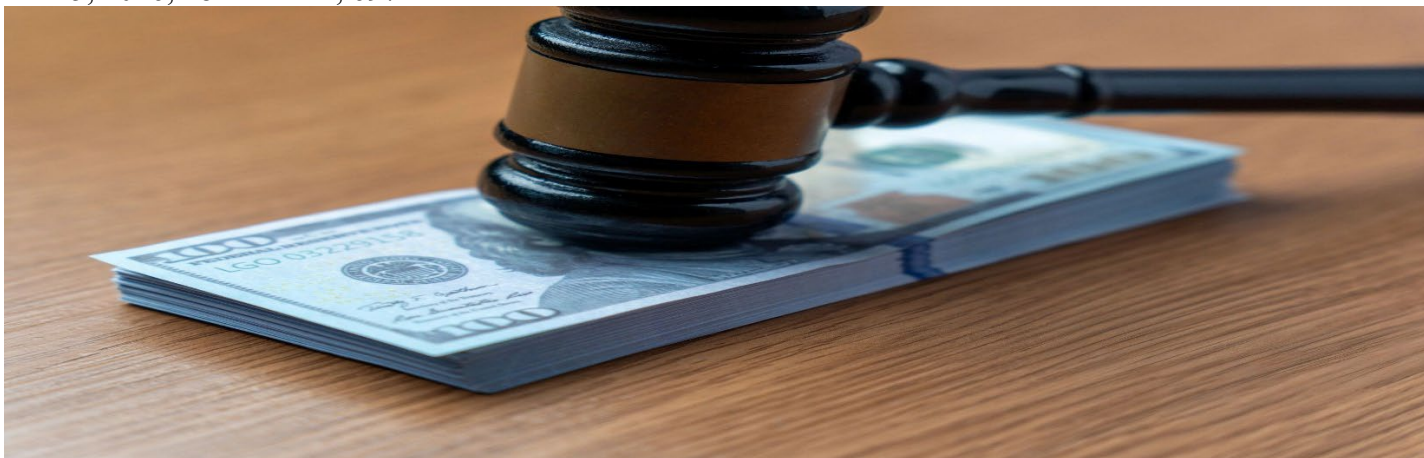
Three Georgia officials who accepted bribes in exchange for favorable cannabis license recommendations have been sentenced in federal court. But the cooperating witness at the center of the case is still providing information to prosecutors — and sources familiar with the investigation tell KushMedia that at least two additional targets have received grand jury subpoenas. This is the most comprehensive account of the Georgia cannabis bribery scandal: how it started, who got paid, and what comes next.

[JC](#)

[Jennifer Cole](#)

Policy & Legislation Reporter

June 5, 2026, 18 min read, 697 words



Legislation · KushMedia

Three Georgia officials who accepted bribes in exchange for favorable cannabis license recommendations have been sentenced in federal court. The sentences — ranging from 18

months to 4 years in federal prison — represent the most significant accountability action in the history of state cannabis licensing corruption. But the investigation is not over.

The Sentences

U.S. District Judge Timothy Batten Sr. sentenced the three defendants on June 4, 2026, in the Northern District of Georgia:

- **Marcus Holloway**, former deputy director of the Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission: 4 years in federal prison, 3 years supervised release, \$285,000 in restitution. Holloway was the highest-ranking official charged and the primary conduit for bribe payments.
- **Darnell Washington**, former licensing analyst at the Commission: 2 years in federal prison, 2 years supervised release, \$95,000 in restitution. Washington provided internal scoring information to applicants and altered evaluation scores in exchange for payments.
- **Patricia Simmons**, former administrative coordinator: 18 months in federal prison, 2 years supervised release, \$42,000 in restitution. Simmons facilitated communications between Holloway and bribe payers and received a smaller share of the payments.

All three pleaded guilty to federal bribery charges in January 2026. None contested the factual basis of the charges.

The Bribery Scheme

The scheme operated from 2019 to 2022, during the initial licensing rounds for Georgia's medical cannabis program. Georgia issued a limited number of Class 1 and Class 2 licenses — six Class 1 licenses for large-scale cultivation and processing, and an unlimited number of Class 2 licenses for dispensaries.

The Class 1 licenses were the primary target. Each license was worth an estimated \$50–100 million in enterprise value, based on comparable licenses in other limited-license states. The competition was intense: more than 60 applicants competed for six licenses.

Holloway, Washington, and Simmons accepted payments totaling \$422,000 from three applicants in exchange for favorable scoring, advance notice of evaluation criteria, and in one case, the alteration of a competitor's application score.

Two of the three applicants who paid bribes received Class 1 licenses. The third did not — prosecutors allege that Holloway took the money but was unable to deliver the license because other commission members scored the application too low.

The Cooperating Witness

The investigation was initiated by a cooperating witness — an applicant who was approached by Holloway and agreed to record their conversations for the FBI. The cooperating witness's identity has not been publicly disclosed.

Sources familiar with the investigation tell KushMedia that the cooperating witness has provided information about additional targets beyond the three who have been sentenced. At least two individuals have received grand jury subpoenas in connection with the ongoing investigation.

"The sentencing of these three defendants is an important step," said U.S. Attorney Ryan Buchanan in a statement. "But this investigation is ongoing, and we will continue to follow the evidence wherever it leads."

The Licensed Companies

The two companies that received licenses through the bribery scheme have not been charged. Under Georgia law, licenses can be revoked for fraud in the application process, but the Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission has not initiated revocation proceedings.

The Commission's inaction has drawn criticism from unsuccessful applicants who argue that licenses obtained through fraud should not be allowed to stand.

"These companies built their businesses on bribery," said one unsuccessful applicant who has filed a civil lawsuit. "The state is allowing them to continue operating as if nothing happened."

The Systemic Problem

The Georgia case is not unique. KushMedia has documented bribery allegations or convictions in cannabis licensing in at least seven states: Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Missouri, and Florida. The pattern is consistent: limited-license systems create enormous economic incentives for corruption, and the regulatory agencies that administer them often lack adequate oversight and anti-corruption safeguards.

"When you create a system where a government decision is worth \$50 million, you're going to get corruption," said one anti-corruption researcher. "The question is whether you build in enough safeguards to catch it."

Sources: U.S. v. Holloway, Washington, and Simmons, N.D. Ga. (2026); sentencing transcripts; U.S. Attorney's Office press release (June 4, 2026); Georgia Access to Medical Cannabis Commission records; civil lawsuit filings; KushMedia investigative reporting.