

The Columbus Dispatch

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One Ohio House speaker says he's a crime victim of another House speaker



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Former Ohio House speaker Cliff Rosenberger wants to be declared a crime victim of another former speaker, Larry Householder. The designation would make Rosenberger eligible to speak at Householder's sentencing in federal court.

Rosenberger's attorney, David Axelrod, filed a motion in the Householder case on Thursday in U.S. District Court.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth Parker's spokeswoman said federal prosecutors will respond to the motion in court filings.

Evidence in Householder's trial showed that Householder and his co-conspirator, lobbyist Neil Clark, wanted to damage Rosenberger and his allies. Householder wanted to be speaker, but Rosenberger and his hand-picked successor, Ryan Smith, stood in his way. All of them are Republicans.

Householder was convicted in a public corruption trial earlier this year and is scheduled to be sentenced by federal Judge Timothy Black later this month.

In April 2018, Rosenberger acknowledged that he had hired Axelrod to respond to inquiries being made at the time by the FBI. Days later, he resigned his legislative seat and weeks later the FBI searched his home and storage unit and issued subpoenas to the Ohio House. He was the first Ohio speaker to resign in more than 50 years.

But five years later, no charges have been filed against Rosenberger.

Axelrod argues that lies and misinformation pedaled by Householder and Clark misled the FBI into launching an investigation into Rosenberger. Ultimately, that led to Rosenberger's early resignation and damage to his reputation and finances, according to the motion.

Listen: What did Householder and others say in the 4-hour dinner recorded by the FBI?

The motion cites secretly recorded phone calls between Householder and Clark and campaign materials prepared by Householder's team that smear Rosenberger.

Rosenberger opposed a bailout for Akron-based FirstEnergy. Once Rosenberger resigned, Householder's plan included making a bailout a key campaign issue for candidates he wanted elected to Ohio House seats.

The material is among more than 1,100 exhibits used as evidence in the public corruption trial against Householder. A jury convicted Householder and former Ohio Republican Party Chairman Matt Borges of racketeering conspiracy in March. They are scheduled to be sentenced June 29 and 30.

Clark, who pleaded not guilty in the case, died by suicide in March 2021.

Laura Bischoff is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.

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