

Florida drops case against COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones in deferred prosecution agreement

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On December 7, COVID-19 whistleblower Rebekah Jones signed a deferred prosecution agreement in connection with a frame-up charge of unauthorized computer use brought against her by the State of Florida in January 2021.

In the agreement with State Attorney Jack Campbell in Leon County Circuit Court, the hacking charge against Jones was dismissed in exchange for signing off on the phrase, “Defendant admits her guilt of the offense(s) charged” and making a commitment to pay the Florida Department of Law Enforcement \$20,000 for investigative costs.

The pretrial plea deal will remain in effect for 24 months, at which point the charge of “exceeding authorized use of computer systems” will be permanently dropped and there will be no record of Jones pleading guilty to anything.

Meanwhile, the agreement stipulates a series of draconian requirements including a guarantee that Jones “shall refrain from violations of any criminal law,” “will work regularly at a lawful occupation” and “see a licensed mental health professional” selected by the State of Florida “a minimum of 1 hour per month.”

The vindictive and bogus computer hacking charge was originally brought against the whistleblower on the orders of the administration of Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis. In the early months of the pandemic, Jones was a data scientist at the Florida Department of Health and she began raising concerns about the lack of transparency within the agency about the public impact of the pandemic.

Jones reported that superiors stripped her of responsibilities and that she was removed from overseeing a critical COVID-19 dashboard that she had

helped to create. In May 2020, Jones was fired for refusing to manipulate COVID-19 data to bolster the pandemic-denying and anti-lockdown narrative of the far-right DeSantis administration.

However, Jones refused to be silenced and created Florida COVID Action and The COVID Monitor that tracked pandemic infections and deaths in Florida and in K-12 schools across the US, respectively. She was then targeted by DeSantis, including a fascist police raid of her home in December 2020 with heavily armed officers who pointed long-guns at her children and seized her phone, personal computer and data storage devices.

The state then claimed she gained “unauthorized access” to an employee messaging platform to send a group text by using her old log-in credentials. The state alleged that she instructed her former employees to “be a hero” and “speak up” against COVID-19 in a November 10, 2020 email. This was the basis of the offense of unauthorized use of a computer brought against her. Jones has steadfastly denied sending the message.

On December 8, Jones published a 2,300-word scathing essay on her Substack page entitled, “State of Florida agrees to dismiss case against Whistleblower Rebekah Jones” which denounces the agreement, explains her reasons for signing it and detailing the entire history of the campaign by DeSantis and the State of Florida against her.

Jones wrote, “I’m free ... after I pay a \$20,000 fee to police for ‘investigative costs,’ inclusive of the time they spent pointing semi-automatic weapons at my two-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son on direct orders from Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.”

She explained that the conclusion of the two-year ordeal came after she rejected multiple earlier plea deals offered to her by state prosecutors, “who sought to settle the case without a trial early on.” This included an offer in March 2021 to plead “adjudication withheld” and other terms “that come with a state wanting to save face on a case they know they will not win at trial. I refused.”

Jones noted that, in one of the offers, the state said they would completely dismiss the case if she would drop her whistleblower case, “admit guilt to a crime I did not commit, apologize to the police and the Department of Health, destroy evidence I maintained proving the state manipulated COVID-19 data (data the state falsely claimed I never had access to), pay the police.” She writes, “In my exact words, I told them to go f**k themselves.”

She further explained that the state is allowing her to space out the payments for the \$20,000 fine over the two years, “but if I can pay the full sum to the police early, the agreement ends early and I won’t be beholden to the state anymore. The rich truly do not experience the same justice system as the rest of us.”

She went on, “All of this because I bruised the ego of an aspiring autocrat with delusions of grandeur. Under Ron DeSantis’ regime, Florida offers false promises of ‘freedom’ while operating as a prison for dissidents, critics, scientists, doctors, teachers, public servants, and anyone who displeases the Florida Führer.

“The state police operate like the Stasi in post-World War II Germany, raiding innocent civilians only for the charges to be ultimately dismissed, using the mere existence of their unchecked power to intimidate people into silence and compliance.”

The corporate media has consistently focused on Jones’ guilty plea and attempted to cover up the criminal actions of the DeSantis government in trying to silence a critic with official whistleblower status.

For example, WUSF highlighted the comments of Georgia Cappleman, an assistant state attorney who signed the deferred prosecution agreement along with State Attorney Campbell. Cappleman said of Jones’ public statements about the agreement, “It’s inconsistent with the document, but I don’t really care what she says.”

The pretrial deferred prosecution agreement is a vindication of the stand taken by Jones and

demonstrates that her malicious prosecution by the DeSantis administration has fallen apart because they had no case against her.

The resolution of the legal battle with Jones comes amid further right-wing moves by DeSantis to attack public health policy. On Tuesday, the Republican governor, who is being groomed as a candidate for President in 2024, held a press conference in West Palm Beach at which he announced the formation of a new state committee devoted to undermining recommendations from federal health agencies.

DeSantis also announced he is requesting a statewide grand jury investigation into “crimes and wrongdoing” related to the COVID-19 vaccine. Although he provided no details, DeSantis said, “In Florida, you know, it is against the law to mislead and to misrepresent, particularly when you’re talking about the efficacy of a drug.”

The charges of law breaking are being directed at pharmaceutical companies and the Biden administration for the distribution of mRNA vaccines “through relentless propaganda while ignoring real-life adverse events,” such as side effects like myocarditis, a type of heart inflammation, that have been observed in rare cases.

DeSantis made his announcement during a roundtable discussion featuring opponents of coronavirus vaccinations. Among the featured speakers were doctors and researchers who had signed the Great Barrington Declaration, a statement released in 2020 that advocated against pandemic restrictions and for herd immunity with no scientific substantiation.



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