

INDIANAPOLIS — The first time **Justin Wykoff** falsified a city concrete contract, back in 2008 as Bloomington's engineering projects director, he pocketed \$1,200 cash.

It was easy, the 44-year-old Bedford resident said during his Tuesday afternoon sentencing hearing in U.S. District Court, the beginning of a years-long embezzlement scheme that bilked the city of Bloomington of more than \$440,000 between April 2011 and February 2014.

Federal Judge Tanya Walton Pratt handed **Wykoff** a 55-month prison sentence. Then he was taken into custody by a U.S. marshal. **Wykoff** will be assigned to a federal prison, and he requested one 500 miles away in Montgomery, Alabama, where he can further his education. He will have to serve 75 percent of his sentence.

Bloomington officials asked that **Wykoff** get the maximum prison sentence possible — 63 months — for not only stealing from the city, but for breaking the public's trust in local government.

"**Justin Wykoff** stole hundreds of thousands of dollars of public money from the people of Bloomington, but he stole something more valuable: the trust of Bloomington residents in their local government," Deputy Mayor Adam Wason said, reading from a statement during the hearing.

He said he worked with **Wykoff** for a decade, and that **Wykoff's** crimes affected his fellow workers as well. "Susie, Denise, Rick, Adrienne, Roy, Matt, Christine ... we were all impacted. We ask for the maximum penalty allowed, the harshest possible sentence."

He said **Wykoff's** legacy is smearing the reputation of city workers and causing distrust in the community. "He has ruined the reputation of an entire organization, that we have fought to restore," Wason said.

Pratt called **Wykoff** the ringleader of a longstanding scam that robbed taxpayers. "This was centered on nothing other than greed," she said when **Wykoff** tried to explain away his acts, saying he was justified because he was working long hours without overtime pay.

"I made mistakes; it's as simple as that. There were countless work hours," **Wykoff** told the judge. "It was misguided justification."

"You were overworked and underpaid?" the judge asked. "So you stole a bunch of money?"

"Yes," he replied.

Justin Wykoff plea agreement

Wykoff admitted he instigated the concrete contract scheme back in 2008, making a deal with Roger Hardin in which **Wykoff** would steer contracts his way in return for cash kickbacks. Some concrete work got done, but most of the contracts were bogus. When Roger Hardin went to prison for a drug conviction in 2011, his son took over his role in the plot.

Pratt ordered that **Wykoff** be taken into custody immediately after the sentencing hearing, an unusual move. Defendants guilty of nonviolent crimes most often do not have to report to federal prison for four to six weeks.

Pratt said that sending **Wykoff** straight to prison will let people know that public corruption, stealing money from taxpayers, will not be tolerated. "He did violate a huge trust and it would be very symbolic for people in Bloomington to know he will be serving his sentence starting today," the judge said.

Defense attorney John Boren said **Wykoff** needed a few days to say goodbye to his ailing mother and to get his affairs in order. And **Wykoff** told the judge he did not have with him the breathing machine he uses at night for sleep apnea. "We'll make sure you get it," Pratt said, calling for a U.S. marshal to take **Wykoff** away.

"I know what I did was wrong," **Wykoff** said. "I'm ready to get this done, get this behind me and gain employment and pay back what I owe."

U.S. Attorney Josh Minkler issued a news release warning government employees who serve the public to take notice. "Public officials are trusted to serve the people, not to serve themselves," said Minkler, who attended the hearing.

"Those who choose to line their pockets using money from the public payroll can expect the full force of the federal prosecution hammer. Judge Walton Pratt's sentence sends a strong message: If you choose to abuse the public's trust as a public official, you will go to prison. There will be no probation, no half-way house, no suspended sentence, no parole. The sentence will be prison."

Wykoff will be on supervised probation for three years after his prison release. He pleaded guilty to 11 counts of wire fraud.

During his time employed with the city, **Wykoff** was responsible for bidding and awarding contracts for public works projects, including road paving and sidewalk construction. Between April 2011 and February 2014, **Wykoff** solicited and received cash bribes and kickbacks from Roger Hardin and his son Zachary Hardin, who operated a company called Reliable Concrete and Construction in Bedford.

In exchange for the kickbacks, **Wykoff** helped the Hardins secure more than \$800,000 in city construction contracts and payments for Reliable Concrete. Both Hardins have pleaded guilty to their roles in the conspiracy. Roger Hardin received a 33-month sentence and his son got one year.

Boren said his client has no idea how much money he took. Federal prosecutors filed charges just back to 2011.

"You stole the money?" he asked **Wykoff** during his testimony Tuesday

"Correct."

"It was easy to take, wasn't it? Low-hanging fruit?"

"Yes."

"You had an opportunity, and you violated the public trust?"

"Correct."

"You have remorse?"

"Yes."

Wykoff: Follow the money

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