



## **Brett W. Ligon**

District Attorney

9th Judicial District

207 W. Phillips, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Conroe, Texas 77301

Mike Holley

First Assistant District Attorney

Ofc: (936) 539-7800

Fax: (936) 760-6940

## **Special Crimes Bureau – Public Integrity Division**

**PRESS RELEASE – September 11, 2018**

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**Conroe, Texas**, Shortly before 11:00 am on September 7, 2018, State Representative Ronald Reynolds was sent to the Montgomery County Jail to serve five concurrent one year sentences. These charges stemmed from a trial that occurred in November of 2015 in which a Montgomery County jury sentenced Reynolds to the maximum penalty allowed, one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine, in each of the five counts of misdemeanor Barratry. Judge Mary Ann Turner presided over the week-long trial in County Court at Law Number Four. The jail sentences will run concurrently. Reynolds was originally indicted on felony Barratry charges, but the November 2014 trial ended in a mistrial after the jury convicted Reynolds on six counts of misdemeanor barratry.

The Barratry trial began on Monday, November 16, 2015. Misdemeanor Barratry carries a punishment range of up to one year in jail and up to a \$4,000 fine.

Evidence was presented during trial that during 2012 and 2013 Reynolds provided blank attorney-client contracts to a habitual felon named Robert Valdez, who then solicited clients on Reynold's behalf and pressured them into signing contracts with Reynolds. Valdez testified that Reynolds would order three clients per week and would pay an average of \$1,000 per client that signed the contract. The evidence also revealed that Reynolds, a member of the Texas Legislature, voted to pass Barratry laws in 2011 and 2013. The jury convicted Reynolds on all five counts of misdemeanor barratry on Friday, November 20, 2015 after approximately one hour of deliberations.

During punishment, the jury heard testimony from two separate clients who testified that Reynolds had settled personal injury claims without their consent, collected money without their knowledge, and had never given them any money from the settlement. Both former clients testified that Reynolds signed their names on settlements without them knowing and they had to hire new attorneys to sue Reynolds to recover a portion of the money owed to them. The jury also heard evidence that Reynolds had been suspended by the State Bar of Texas numerous times, had failed to report his campaign and personal finances to the Texas

Ethics Commission, had been fined for failing to report those finances, and had multiple default judgments against him for nonpayment of those fines.

During closing arguments, prosecutors Joel Daniels and Lisa Stewart asked the jury to sentence the defendant to jail and not probation, "Probation is a rehabilitation tool. You can't rehabilitate a callous disregard for people and a deficiency of character." After the verdict, Chief Prosecutor Joel Daniels said, "Barratry represents a fundamental distortion of the legal system. Lawyers who engage in conduct of this sort denigrate a noble profession."

After being sentenced to the maximum penalty, Reynolds was remanded into custody by Judge Mary Ann Turner to begin his sentence at the Montgomery County Jail. Reynolds immediately appealed his convictions and the appeals were assigned to the Court of Appeals of the Eighth District of Texas, located in El Paso. Reynolds was able to post an appeal bond, which allowed him to get out of jail and remain at liberty until the appellate process was completed.

In an opinion issued on November 29, 2017, the Eight Court of Appeals rejected all of Reynolds's arguments that his conviction should be reversed and ruled that the convictions and sentences should be affirmed. After the opinion came down, Reynolds petitioned the Court of Criminal Appeals, the State's highest criminal court, to review the case. The Court of Criminal Appeals subsequently denied Reynolds's petition for discretionary review and sent the case back to the appellate court so that the trial court's original judgment rendered on the jury's verdict could be carried out. Reynolds appeared in County Court at Law Number 4 of Montgomery County, Texas requesting that his appellate bond be revoked to allow him to begin serving out his sentences immediately. Judge Mary Ann Turner granted Reynold's request.

