

Los Angeles Daily News

Ex-LA Councilman Mitch Englander sentenced to 14 months in federal prison, \$15,000 fine

He was ordered to surrender to authorities on June 1. The sentencing follows a years-long FBI investigation focused on suspected 'pay-to-play' schemes at City Hall



Former Los Angeles city councilman Mitch Englander leaves the Federal Courthouse in Los Angeles Tuesday, July 7, 2020. Englander Pleaded guilty to a single corruption charge related to his accepting cash, hotel rooms and other gifts while a member of the council. He is cooperating with authorities in a wider investigation. (Photo by David Crane, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)

By [Olga Grigoryants](#) | ogrigoryants@scng.com | Los Angeles Daily News

PUBLISHED: January 25, 2021 at 10:10 a.m. | UPDATED: January 25, 2021 at 2:25 p.m.

Former Los Angeles City Councilman Mitchell Englander was sentenced to 14 months in federal prison and ordered to pay a \$15,000 fine on Monday, Jan. 25, in a years-long FBI investigation into suspected “pay-to-play” schemes at City Hall.

<https://www.dailynews.com/2021/01/25/former-la-councilman-mitch-englander-sentenced-to-14-months-in-federal-prison-15100-fine/>

During the sentencing hearing, Assistant US Attorney Mack Jenkins asked US District Judge John F. Walter to impose a sentence of 18 to 24 months in federal prison, while Englander's attorney Janet Levine implored the judge to sentence the ex-councilman to home confinement and probation, with no prison time.

While acknowledging the dangers of COVID-19 in the federal prison system and the many letters submitted on Englander's behalf — including one from a Hollywood actor, the judge decided that the man who once represented the San Fernando Valley's Council District 12 should spend more than a year behind bars.

“Custodial sentences are an important step in restoring public confidence in our local government at a time when many people are questioning it,” Judge Walter said on Monday during a virtual hearing hosted via Zoom. “In addition, the custodial sentence will send a strong message of general deterrence to our elected officials that no person — no matter how powerful, no matter his or her wealth, no matter his or her title — is above the law, and that there are serious consequences when you decide to violate the law, as the defendant is done in this case.”

Walter said, “I conclude that greed and arrogance must have also motivated in part this defendant,” adding that there's “no adequate explanation as to how he totally lost his moral compass and committed this crime.”

Dressed in a dark suit, blue shirt, tie and wearing a protective mask, Englander sat behind his attorney as the judge read the sentence.

“I own what I did. I take full responsibility — 100%,” Englander said, rising to stand while still wearing his mask. “I've hurt the very people I love the most. And so I apologize to the court, I apologize to the FBI, I apologize to the community and constituents and most importantly, I apologize to my family, my wife and my daughters.”

Englander's attorney said during the hearing that her client “takes what he did very seriously,” imploring the judge to impose a sentence “that doesn't require time in a penal facility.”

Levine told the judge, “Our argument was for probation. ... The losses he has suffered would deter others from committing this crime.”

Englander was ordered to surrender to authorities on June 1, 2021.

Englander surrendered to the FBI agents in March and was charged with seven criminal counts of obstructing an investigation into accusations that he accepted cash, kickbacks, escort services, hotel rooms and meals from a businessman during trips to Las Vegas and Palm Springs.

[The former councilman pleaded guilty to one count of scheming to falsify material facts.](#) He is one of four defendants who agreed to plead guilty in the ongoing federal probe of Los Angeles City Hall that involved Los Angeles Councilman Jose Huizar, who has pleaded not guilty and is still awaiting trial on charges of fraud, money laundering and bribery.

<https://www.dailynews.com/2021/01/25/former-la-councilman-mitch-englander-sentenced-to-14-months-in-federal-prison-15100-fine/>

George Esparza, Huizar's former special assistant, two real estate consultants and a lobbyist have pleaded guilty to federal crimes that involve Huizar's case.

Raymond Chan, Mayor Eric Garcetti's former deputy, was charged on suspicion of bribery, federal racketeering and lying to investigators in November and is awaiting trial.

Englander, 50, who now lives in Santa Monica, served as a councilman from 2011 until he suddenly resigned in 2018 with nearly two years left on his term. He represented communities that include Chatsworth, Northridge, Granada Hills and Porter Ranch.

Englander sat on the powerful Planning and Land Use Management Committee, which oversees the city's major commercial and residential development projects.

According to his plea agreement, Englander schemed to cover up cash payments, expensive meals, escort services and other gifts received during the 2017 Las Vegas trip from a businessman who tried to increase his business opportunities in the city, prosecutors said.

Following the trip, the businessman began cooperating with the FBI in the corruption investigation focused on suspected "pay-to-play" schemes involving Los Angeles public officials.

Eventually, Englander and the businessman set up a meeting with another man described by prosecutors as Developer B, so the businessman could introduce his business to the developer.

Once Englander was contacted by FBI agents, he sent a message to the businessman offering partial reimbursement for the Las Vegas trip, prosecutors later said. He mailed a \$442 check to the man that was backdated to appear as if he had tried to reimburse the businessman before being contacted by the FBI.

Prosecutors said Englander knowingly and willfully falsified and concealed material facts related to the federal corruption investigation, particularly covering up that he had accepted items of value during the 2017 trips to Las Vegas and Palm Springs, according to the plea agreement.

Dozens of letters from Englander's friends, relatives and former colleagues were filed with the court in recent weeks. Actor Sean Penn, who met Englander in November 2018 during the Woolsey fire, said Englander is "a good and caring man."

"I know none of the details of Mitch's case," Penn wrote, "only that he is contrite and embarrassed. I am writing from a different angle. I'm writing as a witness to the unique value a person like Mitch brings to people."

But residents demanded a prison sentence for Englander, saying time behind bars was appropriate because it would set an example and send a message to other public figures at City Hall.

Staff writer Steven Rosenberg contributed to this report.