

Federal agents raid Baltimore, Maryland mayor's home and offices as calls for her resignation grow

By Nick Barrickman
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On Thursday, agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) raided nearly a half-dozen locations tied to the public and private activities of Baltimore's embattled Democratic mayor, Catherine Pugh. Federal investigators collected electronic devices, hard drives and other documentation connected to Pugh's awarding of no-bid city contracts to businesses in an apparent exchange for the latter purchasing bulk orders of a series of children's books she had authored.

In addition, agents took financial documents from the law offices of her attorney, Steven D. Silverman and the University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS), where Pugh had until recently been a member of the board of directors.

Pugh is accused of presiding over a web of conflicting interests stemming from the sale of her "Healthy Holly" books to private contractors seeking business with the city of Baltimore.

Pugh, a career Democratic Party functionary within the city's political machine, has been on an extended medical leave relating to pneumonia since early April, after the corruption scandal first came to light. Prior to announcing the leave of absence, Pugh gave a speech declaring that though her transactions with UMMS were a "regrettable mistake," calls for investigation into the sales were a "witch hunt."

Following her public address, which made mention only of a series of deals with UMMS amounting to \$500,000, an additional \$200,000 in sales of the book to hospital chain Kaiser Permanente and Associated Black Charities was discovered, as well as the existence of a \$100,000 donation to her Healthy Holly limited liability company from Maryland businessman

J.P. Grant that occurred during her 2016 mayoral election bid.

Kaiser, UMMS, Associated Black Charities and businesses tied to Grant were all rewarded handsomely with city contracts following their payments.

With the FBI and IRS raids and the increasing likelihood of federal prosecution looming, the chorus of state and local officials calling for Pugh to resign in the "interest of the city" has grown deafening. Republican Governor Larry Hogan, who previously had spoken at Pugh's inauguration, declared publicly that the mayor "has lost the public trust. She is clearly not fit to lead."

Hogan, who has floated the possibility of challenging President Donald Trump as a GOP "moderate" in the 2020 Republican presidential primaries, was joined by Maryland Democratic congressional representatives Elijah Cummings and Dutch Ruppersberger in calling for Pugh's resignation.

Cummings, whose district includes roughly half of the city of Baltimore, called for Pugh to place the "best interests" of the city first in order to preserve "the trust and confidence of all essential stakeholders." Ruppersberger, representing a congressional district which includes parts of the city, declared, "Mayor Pugh can no longer provide the laser-focused leadership the city needs to address its many challenges, including crime, housing and the opioid crisis."

Significantly, local politicians and business organizations, including the Greater Baltimore Committee, which Pugh drew on significantly to support her 2016 mayoral bid, have also called for her resignation. "This is something we just don't need,"

Democratic State Senator Jill P. Carter said to the *Washington Post*. Another Democratic state Senator, Bill Ferguson, told the *Post* that the FBI raids were “an ultimate low.”

According to her attorney, Pugh is aware of the calls for her to resign but is “not completely lucid” and thus unable to make decisions regarding her tenure as mayor. Silverman stated Friday that he had plans to meet with Pugh again Tuesday, which was the earliest she could possibly make a public statement, provided that her health has improved.

Bernard “Jack” Young, leader of the Baltimore City Council currently filling in as mayor as Pugh recuperates, took the step last week of removing several of Pugh’s aides, including Gary Brown, Jr., who had pled guilty to violating campaign finance laws in 2017 after he had funneled \$18,000 into Pugh’s election bid the year before. Brown had been slated to take a vacated seat in the Maryland House of Delegates triggered by Pugh’s election when the lawsuit occurred.

According to WBAL-TV , FBI officials also sought information on Brown in Thursday’s raids.

Pugh won election in the wake of the mass protests in Baltimore and nationally against the police murder of 25-year-old Freddie Gray in 2015. Her campaign worked to channel the intense social anger of the city’s working population caused by years of deindustrialization, budget cutting and police brutality into racist calls for more black businesses and identity politics. Pugh also sought to distance herself from the corruption of former administrations, including that of her 2016 opponent, former Democratic mayor Sheila Dixon, who was forced to resign in 2010 after being found guilty of embezzling gift cards intended for poor families.

Now, with the naked and endemic corruption of the Baltimore political establishment yet again exposed for all to see, the response of the federal government and the mounting calls for resignation reflect fears within the ruling class that the upsurge of working-class anger that erupted in 2015 could reignite.

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