

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	)	
	)	
v.	)	Criminal No. 26-cr-10119-JEK
	)	
PATRICK VAN COTT,	)	
	)	
Defendant	)	

**GOVERNMENT’S MEMORANDUM REGARDING
SENTENCING AS TO PATRICK VAN COTT**

Patrick Van Cott served as the Director of Food Services for the Plymouth Public Schools for 22 years before he was fired in June 2025. His job was to use funds provided by the state and federal governments to make sure each school child had access to nutritious food in a clean, safe and caring atmosphere. Instead, for over a decade, Van Cott stole food and equipment from the school system to fund his own personal money-making side hustle – a seasonal business called the “Snack Shack.”

Van Cott deserves a sentence of 10 months in prison not just because he stole over \$30,000, but also because he abused the trust of so many people, including Plymouth Public Schools students and employees, when he used students’ lunch money to buy high-end burgers, coffee makers, refrigerators, and grills for his side business. He deserves a sentence of 10 months in prison not just because he stole deli meat, but because Van Cott forced his employees to slice that deli meat for his Snack Shack summer after summer, for more than a decade, on school time, when they were supposed to be preparing meals for students. And he deserves a sentence of 10 months in prison because his crimes were driven by pure greed, not need—this was a man who

earned over \$100,000 a year and had a house in Sandwich and one in Hyannis. The circumstances, set forth in more detail below, more than warrant a 10-month sentence.

I. Patrick Van Cott's Criminal Conduct

The Plymouth Public School system is comprised of 12 schools, including eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools, all located in Plymouth, Massachusetts. In Massachusetts, meals for all public school students are free. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) pays some portion of every meal through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reimburses school districts for the amount the USDA does not cover for each student. The DESE also administers the NSLP in Massachusetts. The Plymouth Public Schools operate a school meal point of sale system and report to the DESE the number of students that receive food from its schools. The DESE then releases both USDA funds and State funds back to the Plymouth Public Schools' revolving fund to cover the costs of those student meals. The Plymouth Public Schools pays for cafeteria equipment, payroll for cafeteria workers and food purchases through its revolving fund, which is funded by the Federal and State funds paid by the DESE for reimbursable meals.

Patrick Van Cott (Van Cott) served as the Director of Food Services for the Plymouth Public Schools from 2003 until he was fired in June 2025. As the Director of Food Services, Van Cott was responsible for ordering food, cafeteria supplies and equipment for the Plymouth Public Schools.

In addition to working for the Plymouth Public Schools, Van Cott operated a seasonal business called the “Snack Shack” on Sandy Neck Beach in Barnstable beginning in 2014. The menu for the Snack Shack included ham sandwiches, turkey sandwiches, and hamburgers.

In May and June 2025, the Plymouth Police Department received information that led to the execution of state search warrants at the Snack Shack. Subsequent investigation by the Plymouth Police Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation revealed that at least between November 2023 and May 2025, Van Cott had caused Plymouth Public Schools to purchase approximately \$18,600 in restaurant equipment that he stole for use at his Snack Shack. The items included a \$4,000 freezer and two \$2,200 refrigerators, but also included small items such as fryolator baskets valued at \$8 each, an \$84 coffeemaker, and two hanging chalk boards which totaled \$112. Specific items are outlined in the Information, including:

- In November 2023, Van Cott caused the Plymouth Public Schools to pay approximately \$3,832 for two 12-inch hot plates which he used at his Snack Shack until they were seized from the Snack Shack by the Plymouth Police Department in June 2025.
- In June 2024, Van Cott caused the Plymouth Public Schools to pay approximately \$2,200 for a single door solid top mount refrigerator. When the vendor asked Van Cott, “Where’s it going and where am I billing,” Van Cott texted the vendor, “590 Sandy Neck Rd. W. Barnstable” (*i.e.*, the address for the Snack Shack) and then “Billing to Plymouth public schools.” Van Cott used the refrigerator at the Snack Shack until June 2025, when it was seized from the Snack Shack by the Plymouth Police Department.
- In November 2024, Van Cott caused the Plymouth Public Schools to pay approximately \$3,950 for an Atosa brand two-door freezer to replace a freezer at the Plymouth South Middle School that had become inoperable and needed a new mechanical part and professional service. In the meantime, Van Cott arranged for the old freezer to be repaired, removed the new Atosa freezer from school property during the April 2025 school vacation week, and used the new Atosa freezer at his Snack Shack until June 2025, when it was seized from the Snack Shack by the Plymouth Police Department.

- In March 2025, Van Cott caused the Plymouth Public Schools to pay approximately \$2,268.99 for an undercounter refrigerator which he used at his Snack Shack until it was seized from the Snack Shack by the Plymouth Police Department in June 2025.

Van Cott also went to great lengths to cover his thefts. For example, in May 2024, he ordered three expensive pieces of equipment—a chargrill, a fryolater, and a griddle—from a vendor, and told the vendor that the items, which were not typical school cafeteria equipment pieces, were going to be used by students for a “Top Chef” type of cooking program. When the vendor invoiced the school \$3,350 for the items, Van Cott told the vendor that he had made a mistake and had not gotten permission for the program. Van Cott explained that he had used the items and could not return them, and Van Cott asked the vendor to do him a “favor” and send Van Cott a false invoice with different (cafeteria-typical) items for the same amount of money, which Van Cott then submitted to the schools for payment. The Plymouth Police Department seized the grill, griddle and fryolater from the Snack Shack in June 2025.

Investigators also confirmed that Van Cott had stolen deli meat every summer since he started the Snack Shack in 2014. Starting the week before Memorial Day and ending around Labor Day every year, Van Cott would ask the cafeteria staff preparing sandwiches for summer lunches to slice two bags of turkey and one bag of ham, put it in a box with his initials (*i.e.*, “PVC”) and leave it on a shelf in the refrigerator at the cafeteria facility where they were working. The workers provided consistent descriptions of the amounts of turkey (9 pounds) and ham (4.5 pounds) Van Cott required them to slice and how it was packaged in one-gallon Ziploc bags. Van Cott exclusively used deli meat from Plymouth Public Schools for the sandwiches he sold at his Snack Shack. Van Cott also ordered food through the Plymouth Public Schools’

accounts that could not have been served at the schools, such as raw beef burgers (schools only order pre-cooked meat). Moreover, Van Cott took items such as boxes of hot dogs, salad dressings, paper goods, condiments, and other items from the cafeteria routinely during the summer months.

Below is a list of the items the Plymouth Police Department and FBI identified as having been ordered by Van Cott with Plymouth Public School funds and diverted to the Snack Shack.

Service Date or Order Date	Description	Amount
03/24/2025	Undercounter Refrigerator	\$2,268.99
04/24/2025	Fryolator Baskets x 2	\$16.00
05/02/2025	Cuisinart Coffee Maker	\$84.17
05/02/2025	Hanging Chalk Boards x 2	\$112.08
11/19/2024	ATOSA 2-door Freezer	\$3,950.00
11/30/2023	12' Burner Hot Plates x 2	\$3,832.00
04/24/2025	ATOSA MROS-2RE Overshelf	\$250.00
04/24/2025	27" Standard Top Sandwich Prep Table	\$1,700.00
04/24/2025	1/2 size convection oven	\$850.00
05/28/2024	ATRC-24 Atosa chargrill	\$900.00
05/28/2024	24" Griddle, Cookrite ATTG-24	\$1,450.00
05/28/2024	ATFS- 40 Atosa Fryer	\$1,000.00
06/27/2024	Single Door Solid Top Mount Fridge	\$2,200.00
May 2014-June 2025	Deli Ham 2014 - 2025	\$2,065.73
May 2014-June 2025	Deli Turkey 2014 - 2025	\$6,136.47
04/17/2024	Whittier Farms Burger Patties	\$3,199.20
Total		\$30,014.64

With respect to the deli turkey and deli ham, the FBI used the lowest price per pound provided by the Plymouth Public Schools, and calculated the loss based on the amounts of 9 pounds of turkey and 4.5 pounds of ham per week each summer, even though the cafeteria staff reported that Van Cott often asked them to slice twice as much deli meat per week. It is the government's

position that the loss is very conservatively calculated at **\$30,014.64**.

II. U.S. Sentencing Guidelines Calculation

The total loss attributable to Van Cott's fraud is at least **\$30,014.64**, and the government agrees with the USSG calculation set forth by Probation in the Final Presentence Report (the PSR):

U.S. SENTENCING GUIDELINES CALCULATIONS 18 U.S.C. §§ 666(a)(1)(A), 1341, 1343, 2314 (Counts One-Twelve)	
Base Offense Level (U.S.S.G. § 2B1.1(a)(1))	7
Loss between \$15,000 and \$40,000 (U.S.S.G. § 2B1.1(b)(1)(C)) ¹	+4
Abuse of Position of Private Trust (U.S.S.G. § 3B1.3)	+2
<i>Adjusted Offense Level</i>	<i>13</i>
Acceptance of Responsibility (U.S.S.G. § 3E1.1(a) and (b))	-2
Zero-Point Offender (U.S.S.G. §§ 4C1.1(a) and (b))	-2
TOTAL OFFENSE LEVEL	9

III. The 3553(a) Factors

a. The Nature and Circumstances of the Offense Warrant a 10-Month Sentence

Van Cott's crimes were serious, and they deserve serious punishment. The total monetary loss resulting from Van Cott's crime is over \$30,000. But Van Cott's fraud is not just a financial crime, it was a calculated and deliberate betrayal of trust. The Plymouth Public Schools trusted Van Cott to use federal and state funds to provide its students with "access to food of high nutritious quality in an atmosphere of cleanliness, safety and personal caring." See Ex. 1, Victim

¹ The offense level increase for a loss of \$30,014.64 under the Amendments to the USSG effective November 1, 2026, would also be 4 levels, because the loss more than \$20,000 and less than \$50,000. See https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/amendment-process/reader-friendly-amendments/202605_RF.pdf.

Impact Statement-Plymouth Public Schools. Van Cott was “responsible for operating the Food Service program in a self-sustaining fiscal manner while following both state and federal procurement and the Federal Nutritional Guidelines.” *Id.* Instead, Van Cott used state and federal money to run his Snack Shack. He bought equipment for his business instead of the schools’ cafeterias, he bought high-end food products that he sold for 100% profit, and he used the schools’ Food Services employees to slice deli meat for him every week of the summer so that he could sell sandwiches by the seashore and save on labor costs.

Van Cott’s crimes were not a momentary lapse in judgment, one bad choice, one error in judgment, or one mistake. He stole from the Plymouth Public Schools thousands of times over the course of at least 10 years, and he would have continued to steal from the schools had he not been caught. And it is important to note that *he was caught* – he would have kept going, if someone had not been brave enough to finally speak up and finally say enough is enough.

Moreover, Van Cott’s theft was driven not by necessity, but by his own greed and desire. Van Cott earned over \$100,000 a year as the Director of Food Services, and he owned a house in Sandwich and Hyannis—he was not struggling financially. PSR, ¶¶ 67, 69. He stole food and equipment from the schools not because he needed to put food on the table, he did it to make extra money during the summer when he was supposed to be providing meals to kids in summer camps and getting ready for the next school year. Given the nature and circumstances of Van Cott’s fraud, he deserves a prison sentence at the high end of the applicable USSG range.

b. Van Cott’s History and Characteristics Warrant a 10-Month Sentence

Van Cott’s history and characteristics, too, justify a 10-month sentence. He was raised in a “close-knit, loving home environment.” PSR, ¶ 57. He did not endure any financial hardships,

and he shares close relationships with and has the support of his sisters, brothers and wife. PSR ¶¶ 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66. Van Cott had a 22-year career with the Plymouth Public Schools. *Id.* ¶ 9. He owns homes in Sandwich and Hyannis. *Id.*, ¶¶ 67, 69. He has had many advantages in his life, advantages that many defendants who come before this Court for sentencing have lacked. And in spite of those privileges, he stole from the people who trusted him.

To the extent Van Cott may argue that his lack of criminal history, career prior to his fraud, commitment to his family, or the collateral consequences associated with this conviction support a downward variance, his claims are without merit. The Guidelines generally prohibit consideration of socioeconomic status, successful employment history, family responsibilities and reputational collateral consequences in fashioning a sentence. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 994(d) (“The Commission shall assure that the guidelines and policy statements are entirely neutral as to . . . socioeconomic status of offenders.”); *see also* U.S.S.G. § 5H1.2 (vocational skills and education not ordinarily relevant); U.S.S.G. § 5H1.5 (employment record not ordinarily relevant); U.S.S.G. § 5H1.6 (family ties and responsibilities not ordinarily relevant); U.S.S.G. § 5H1.10 (socioeconomic status not relevant). Indeed, courts have “repeatedly expressed a distaste for sentencing that reflects different standards of justice being applied to white and blue collar criminals,” based on the need to deter large-scale fraud and the possibility that a lenient sentence may “undermine[] public confidence in whether the justice system is doing equal right to the poor and the rich as our oath requires.” *United States v. Hoffman*, 901 F.3d 523, 556-57 (5th Cir. 2018) (internal citation, quotation marks, and alterations omitted); *see also, e.g., United States v. Mueffelman*, 470 F.3d 33, 40 (1st Cir. 2006) (emphasizing importance of “the deterrence of white-collar crime (of central concern to Congress), the minimization of discrepancies between

white-and blue-collar offenses, and limits on the ability of those with money or earning potential to buy their way out of jail”).

Patrick Van Cott knew right from wrong, and he understood his fiduciary duties to the Plymouth Public Schools. Given Van Cott’s history and the circumstances of his fraud scheme described above, a 10-month prison sentence is appropriate.

c. A Sentence of 10 Months Reflects the Seriousness of the Offense,
Promotes Respect for the Law, Provides Just Punishment, and
Serves the Goals of Adequate Deterrence

The need for general deterrence also weighs in favor of the government’s sentencing recommendation because Van Cott’s position as a trusted school system employee made his theft difficult to detect and report, as evidenced by the years that went by before his scheme was uncovered. A meaningful sentence is necessary to deter other public employees from engaging in this kind of theft and to encourage other potential whistleblowers to come forward.

Moreover, a sentence of 10 months fits squarely within the range of reasonable sentences imposed for similar conduct—that is, city or county employees stealing from the employers who trusted them. For example, in 2017, Judge Sorokin sentenced former Quincy Police Department Lieutenant Thomas Corliss to one year and one day in prison after being convicted at trial for defrauding the police department of \$8,000 in overtime pay. *United States v. Corliss*, 1:16-cr-10250-LTS (Docket No. 94). More recently, in 2026, Judge Talwani sentenced former Boston City Councilor Tania Fernandes Anderson to one month in prison for stealing \$7,000 in bonus money she caused to be paid to a City employee. *United States v. Anderson*, 1:24-cr-10364-IT (Docket No. 67).

As noted in the Victim Impact Statement submitted by the Plymouth Public Schools, the

true extent of the harm caused by Van Cott's crimes is unquantifiable, and includes "reputational harm, good will, and administrator time spent addressing this matter, rather than attending to the important work of educating our children." Ex. 1, at 3. The sentence in this case should deter officials like Van Cott from using public coffers as their personal piggy banks, ultimately costing their employers the trust and confidence of their constituents, in addition to the stolen money.

A sentence of 10 months is just punishment for Van Cott's crimes. It is a sentence that promotes respect for the law, and that will serve the goals of specific and general deterrence.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons and those outlined in the PSR, the government recommends a sentence of 10 months' imprisonment, to be followed by three years of supervised release, restitution in the amount of \$30,014.64, and a special assessment of \$300.

Respectfully submitted

LEAH B. FOLEY,
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

Date: September 30, 2026

By: /s/Kristina E. Barclay
KRISTINA E. BARCLAY
Assistant U.S. Attorney

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that this document filed through the ECF system will be sent electronically to the registered participants as identified on the Notice of Electronic Filing (NEF).

Date: September 30, 2026

/s/Kristina E. Barclay
Kristina E. Barclay
Assistant United States Attorney

EXHIBIT 1

Victim Impact Statement – Plymouth Public Schools

This statement is submitted on behalf of the Plymouth Public Schools. As Superintendent, I am responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school district.

The Plymouth Public Schools educates approximately 6,900 students across 14 schools. Although school breakfast and lunch have been free for all students since 2020, approximately 35% of our student population is eligible for free and reduced lunch. That is to say, a large number of our students rely on the school food services for consistent access to healthy food.

Patrick Van Cott served as the Director of Food Services for the Plymouth Public Schools between 2003 and 2025. In that role, he was responsible for providing each school child with access to food of high nutritious quality in an atmosphere of cleanliness, safety and personal caring. He was responsible for operating the Food Service program in a self-sustaining fiscal manner while following both state and federal procurement and the Federal Nutritional Guidelines.

The U.S. Attorney's Office has shared with the school district the loss calculation. Since that information has already been provided to the Court, I will not address it in detail other than to note that the equipment identified as having been "returned" to the school district are not necessary or usable in the schools. The resale value of those items is greatly depreciated and the District must comply with Massachusetts procurement laws to properly dispose of property it no longer needs. Thus, although the loss calculation reduces the gross amount by the cost of the items returned to the District, the District has not and cannot obtain over \$13,000 of value in those items.

Without minimizing the costs identified in the loss calculation, the actual cost to the District is far greater and less tangible. As the Court is likely aware, each year, Massachusetts

municipalities must establish their local budgets to cover the costs of local services, including police, fire, DPW, and schools. In the Town of Plymouth, the budget must be passed at Town Meeting.

The budget presented at Town Meeting includes all departments and, typically, the cost of operating the schools is a significant portion of the budget. The budget for the schools, in particular, is created by the School Committee, which has line-item authority over its portion of the budget. It is imperative that the people of Plymouth trust the School Committee and school leaders to develop and implement fair and accurate budgets. This is particularly true at present, when many school districts across the Commonwealth face significant budget constraints, warranting requested for overrides and staff or services reductions.

Although, to-date, the Plymouth Public Schools have managed to provide level services without significant budget, staffing, or service changes, it still faces budget constraints. Further, because public schools are funded through taxpayers, the District's budget, is subject to public scrutiny.

That scrutiny has increased exponentially following the public reporting of Mr. Van Cott using school district resources for his private business. The public has, understandably, asked repeatedly how Mr. Van Cott got away with his actions for so long, without the administration knowing about it. We have asked ourselves the same questions and taken measures to prevent similar situations in the future.

Specifically, in response to these events, the district undertook a comprehensive review of its financial oversight and purchasing practices to reduce the likelihood that similar misconduct could occur in the future. The District hired Clifton Larson Allen, LLP to conduct an internal controls audit, at a cost of \$25,290.31. The District also engaged Heartland Payment Systems

for improved sales tracking and food inventory, at a cost of \$26,772, and adopted new inventory and resource measures, including implementing a barcode system (\$720.03) for equipment inventory and Follett's Resource Manager at a cost of \$15,580.00. In total, the audits and new systems cost the District \$68,362.34.

In addition to hiring outside providers for this work, I and other administrators have spent significant amounts of time reviewing and addressing this matter, including internal investigations and responding to public inquiries. We have also had to engage school district legal counsel for advice and to address ancillary matters arising from the criminal charges. For example, as a District employee, Mr. Van Cott is a member of the Plymouth County Retirement System ("PCRS"). Retirement eligibility decisions are within the discretion of PCRS but the District took actions to protect potential assets held through PCRS for purposes of restitution. At the request of community members, the District, through counsel, has also researched possible attachment of Mr. Van Cott's house for purposes of restitution. Our legal costs attributable to Mr. Van Cott's actions, including personnel action, the PCRS process, and cooperating in these criminal matters, are, conservatively \$3840.

In short, the scope and nature of Mr. Van Cott's actions have caused significant harm to the Plymouth Public Schools. Much of the harm is unquantifiable, such as reputational harm, good will, and administrator time spent addressing this matter, rather than attending to the important work of educating our children.

As set forth herein, however, some of the costs to the District are quantifiable and substantial. Taken together, the costs of the inventory, as calculated by the FBI (net amount \$16,951.40), the cost of audits and upgraded systems (\$68,362.34), and the additional legal fees

(\$3840) total over \$89,153.74. To the District's knowledge, Mr. Van Cott has assets in the PCRS and in his house sufficient to cover those costs.

Accordingly, the Plymouth Public Schools respectfully requests that the Court order full restitution as permitted under the Mandatory Victims Restitution Act. Although no sentence can fully repair the damage caused by Mr. Van Cott's actions, we respectfully ask the Court to consider the full scope of the harm caused by his conduct when imposing sentence. This includes not only the financial losses, but also the prolonged nature of the misconduct, the abuse of a position of trust and authority, the misuse of public resources, and the lasting impact on the District, its employees, the students and families we serve, and the community's confidence in its public institutions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C Campbell".

Christopher Campbell, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Plymouth Public Schools