

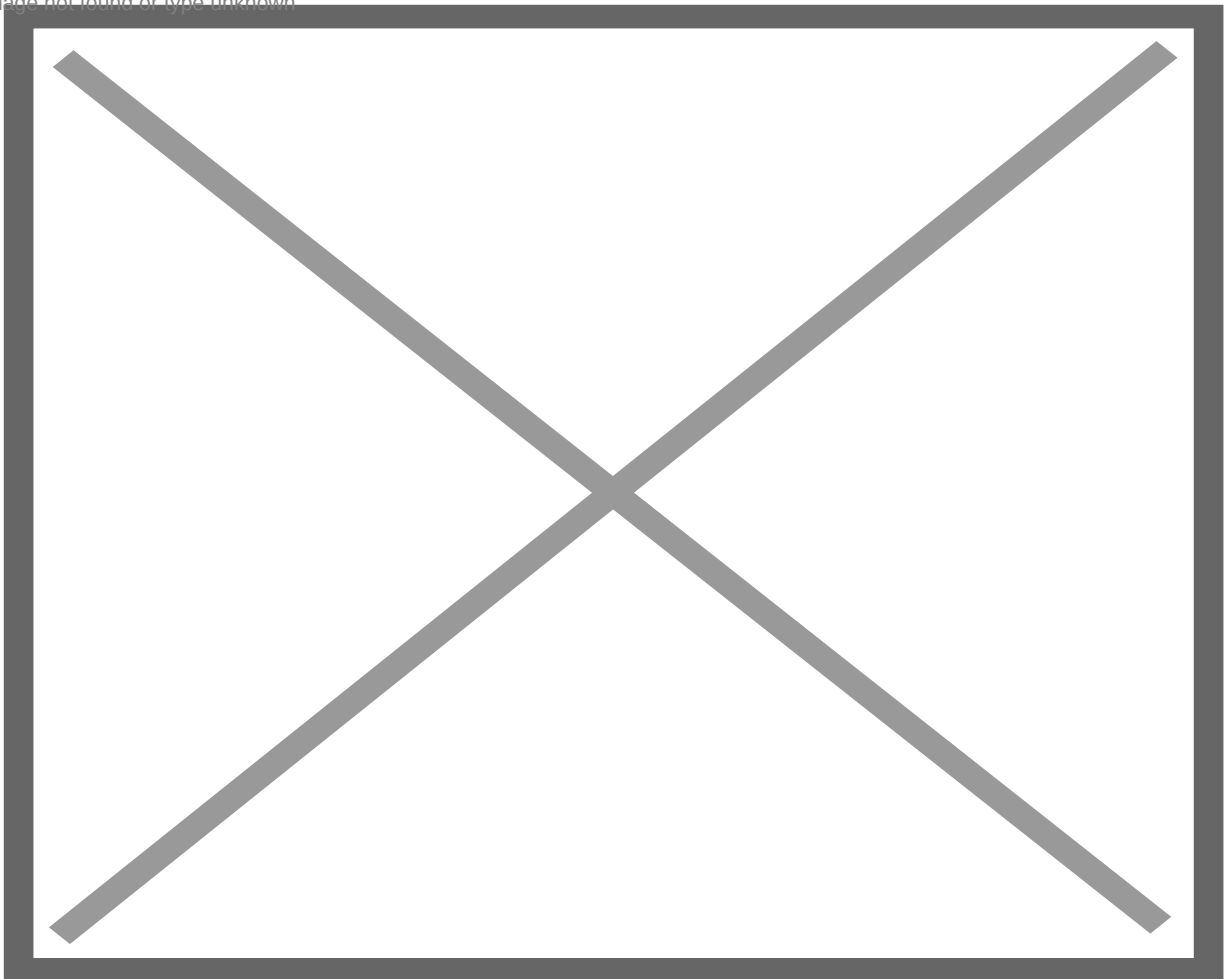
Former Senator Steven Payne Faces Sentencing in Florida Sexual Battery Case

Convicted in October 2025 after a three-day Duval County trial, Payne is scheduled to be sentenced Thursday and faces a possible life term following the court's rejection of multiple post-trial motions.

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Janeke Simon **February 17, 2026**

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Senator Steven Payne Sr. on Wed. July 20, 2022 was expelled from the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Former USVI legislator Steven Payne will be sentenced on sexual battery charges on Thursday in a Duval County courtroom.

The former at-large senator from St. John was tried in Jacksonville for attacking a minor who had become his ward in 2016. After Hurricane Irma, the girl moved from the Virgin Islands to Florida,

and was settled in the home of Mr. Payne's sister. That is where Mr. Payne attacked her, [she told Consortium journalists](#), in a heart-wrenching interview in 2022. That interview followed two previous reports of sexual harassment and assault, one by a [female legislative staffer](#), and the other by a former co-worker when Mr. Payne was a police officer.

Following a months-long investigation, Mr. Payne was [expelled from his seat](#) in the 34th Legislature following Consortium reporting. A lawsuit alleging that his removal was unlawful was dismissed by the court [two years later](#).

By that time, Mr. Payne was contending with serious criminal charges, having been [arrested in Orlando](#) in 2023 on a warrant issued by Duval County. During his trial, prosecutors relied on testimony by Steffi Emilien, the woman he assaulted as a minor in Jacksonville, and on the account of Chezni Jones, [who worked at the school](#) to which Mr. Payne had been assigned as a VIPD officer. He assaulted her in 2005, she told Consortium journalists.

The former youth leader, police officer, and music teacher was convicted in October 2025 [after a three-day trial](#). Sentencing was initially scheduled for November but was postponed several times as the court heard, and dismissed, more than one attempt by Mr. Payne to request a new trial or submit what he declared to be exculpatory or mitigating evidence.

With his efforts to escape accountability having all failed thus far, Mr. Payne now awaits the determination of his fate. He faces a potential maximum of life in prison.