

Report: Former SPLC Executive Heidi Beirich Arrested on Federal Fraud Charges

Heidi Beirich, a former senior executive at the Southern Poverty Law Center, was arrested in California on Tuesday and charged with federal fraud and money laundering offenses stemming from her time overseeing the organization's intelligence-gathering operations, according to the Department of Justice and a CNN report that first disclosed the arrest.

Attorney General Todd Blanche announced the charges, which include conspiracy to commit wire fraud, conspiracy to submit false statements to a federally insured financial institution, and conspiracy to conceal money laundering. Beirich served as the SPLC's chief financial officer and as director of its intelligence project between 2012 and 2019, a period during which the organization tracked and reported on extremist groups nationwide.

Prosecutors allege Beirich helped direct the use of tax-exempt donor contributions to compensate confidential sources embedded inside extremist organizations, including groups tied to the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations and the National Alliance. According to charging documents, one source, identified in court filings only as "F-9," received approximately \$1.2 million in payments over roughly two decades of work as an informant.



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Investigators say Beirich shared a joint bank account with a romantic partner between 2015 and 2021 while that partner was allegedly involved in the same source-payment operations, and

that roughly \$140,000, about 66 percent of the deposits into that account, originated from the arrangement under scrutiny. In total, prosecutors allege the scheme involved the diversion of \$4.1 million in tax-exempt funds earmarked for source compensation.

Blanche, in announcing the charges, said the following: "I believe she was part of the effort to open bank accounts in completely fictitious companies' names and make payments to individuals for reasons that were not accurate as described... This is exactly what we said would happen in a case like this, which is that our investigators and the U.S. attorneys and the agents working the case will keep on working it even after the initial indictment."

The Southern Poverty Law Center, founded in 1971 and long known for its "hate group" tracking and legal advocacy work, has faced years of scrutiny from critics who accused the organization of overstating threats and mismanaging its finances, criticism the organization has repeatedly disputed. The SPLC has not been charged as an organization, and it was not immediately clear whether the group was cooperating with the federal investigation.

Beirich left the SPLC in 2019 to co-found the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, a separate research and advocacy organization. She had not issued a public statement as of Tuesday night, and it was not immediately clear whether she had retained legal counsel.

The case is being handled out of California, where Beirich was taken into custody. Federal prosecutors said the investigation remains active, and additional charges or defendants could not be ruled out.

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