FORTY-THREE

43AMERICANS

BUILDING YOUR STORY

How to explain what was done to you

For anyone who has been investigated, charged, or prosecuted by the federal government — and wants the record to say something other than what the press release said.

They have the press release, the podium, and the paperwork.

You have one thing they cannot answer. **The truth, told well enough that it cannot be dismissed.**

Written by Angelica Pacheco · Case 43.
She was charged with eight federal counts and $19.1 million. Not one produced a conviction. Days before trial the government dropped every count — and replaced them with a different charge that appeared nowhere in the indictment.

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"The United States Attorney is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty whose obligation to govern impartially is as compelling as its obligation to govern at all; and whose interest, therefore, in a criminal prosecution is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done."

BERGER V. UNITED STATES, 295 U.S. 78, 88 (1935)
POSTED BY UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICES ON THEIR OWN WEBSITES,
AS THEIR VISION STATEMENT.

That is the standard. It is theirs, not ours — they put it on the wall.

This guide exists because there is no mechanism that makes them meet it. A prosecutor who is wrong about you faces no consequence. The office that reviews them almost never finds fault and will not say who. A press release announcing charges later dismissed stays online forever, because no rule requires anyone to take it down.

Every review available to you happens inside the institution being reviewed.

So the record is the only ground left to fight on. Not outrage. Anyone can produce that, and it persuades nobody who is not already persuaded. What a system like this has no answer for is a date, a document, and a number that does not add up.

I learned that the hard way. I ran for the Hialeah City Council four times before my neighbors elected me. Seven days after I was indicted — before any trial, before a jury heard anything — the Governor of Florida suspended me from office. Thousands of people had voted for me. None of them got to vote on that.

Start here

WHY NOBODY BELIEVES YOU YET

You have told it a hundred times. To family, to friends, to anyone who would sit still. And you have watched their faces go polite.

That is not because they do not care. It is how the story came out.

Almost everyone tells it the same way: the anger first, then the conclusion — *they railroaded me, it was political, the whole thing was rigged.* Both of those are the end of your thinking. You got there over years, through a thousand small facts nobody else has heard.

Hand someone the conclusion without the facts and you are asking them to trust you about the most serious accusation a person can make. Strangers will not. Not because they think you are lying. Because they have nothing to hold on to.

A reader who works out the conclusion for themselves believes it far harder than one who was handed it.

So: give them the facts in the order you lived them, and let them arrive where you already are.

One

WHY SPECIFICITY IS YOUR ONLY WEAPON

Understand this before you write a word.

In a federal fraud trial the government almost never has direct proof of what a defendant was thinking. There is rarely a confession. Intent gets proven by inference — the timing, what a person did and did not do, what a reasonable person would have known. Juries are told they may infer intent from circumstances, and that this counts every bit as much as a document.

It works. People are convicted on it constantly.

Now point the same reasoning the other way. A defendant who says *look at the timing, look at what they ignored* is told none of it proves anything.

Same argument. Same words. One convicts. The other is called speculation.

You will not win that argument, and neither will anyone else. What you can do is refuse to fight there. Do not try to prove what was in someone's head. Show what happened, in order, with dates.

Two

YOUR WORD IS EVIDENCE

You may be thinking: *I have no proof. It is just my word.*

Your word is not "just." What you saw and heard is testimony, and courts run on it every day. But it only works when it is specific.

Here is the difference, using a real one.

> THE VERSION THAT GETS YOU NOWHERE
>
> She worked incredibly hard to become a nurse. She overcame a lot.

> THE VERSION HER CASEWORKER WROTE TO A FEDERAL JUDGE
>
> She was seventeen, a mother of two, pregnant, with a GED and no car. Class at Mercy Hospital from seven in the morning to two. A cafeteria job from four until midnight, twenty dollars a day. She was in class Wednesday. She gave birth Thursday. She was back Monday.

No documents behind that second one. Nobody reads it and shrugs.

The nursing school had rejected her. Her caseworker's office issued bus passes and she rode multiple buses across Miami, every day, to go back and ask again until someone canceled and the seat was hers.

Nobody invents that. That is why it lands.

Notice what is not in it. No adjectives. No incredibly hard. No overcame so much. Just a schedule, a wage, and three days of a week. The feeling is produced entirely by the facts.

NOW YOURS

Write one thing you did that nobody would believe unless you named the day.

Not a summary. A specific day, with the time, the place, and what it cost you.

Three

THE THREE KINDS OF SENTENCE

Everything you write is one of three things. Mixing them up is the only real mistake you can make.

ONE — WHAT YOU SAW AND HEARD

You were there. No document required. Be specific, and be honest about what you actually remember.

TWO — WHAT IS ON PAPER

Dates, charges, numbers, filings, what a judge said, what the government's own press release claimed. The strongest thing you have.

THREE — WHAT YOU BELIEVE

Your conclusion. You are free to write it. You just have to say out loud that it is what you believe. Those few words are the difference between a sentence nobody can touch and one that sinks everything around it.

> DANGEROUS
>
> They indicted me because I had just been elected.

> SAFE — AND IT SAYS THE SAME THING
>
> The indictment came in June 2024. I had taken office seven months earlier. The Governor suspended me seven days later, with no trial. I have always believed those things were connected. I cannot prove it. I am telling you what I think.

Same accusation. The second one is unanswerable, because every part of it is either a date or a labeled belief.

Four

WORK THE WORD BACKWARD

A lot of people land on **weaponized**. You did not pick it at random. Something happened and that word is where you ended up.

The things that got you there are stronger than the word.

Tell someone "the food was bad" and they shrug. Tell them "the chicken was pink in the middle and the waiter argued with me about it" and they are on your side instantly. Same complaint. One is a verdict. The other is what you saw.

Below are nine things people usually mean. Tick the ones that happened to you. Most people tick two or three.

01 ☐ **The timing.** Charges came right after you did something — filed a complaint, testified, went public, sued somebody, refused to settle, won an election.

What you did / the date / when the charges came

02 ☐ **Others did the same and nothing happened.** Competitors, colleagues, comparable businesses.

Who / what was the same / how you know / whether it is public

03 ☐ **The sentence does not match.** Someone did as much or more and got far less.

Who / what they got / what you got

04 ☐ **The response did not match the conduct.** Armed agents. A dawn search. Years of investigation for a paperwork case.

How many agents / what time / who else was home / was press there

05 ☐ **The case moved when you pushed.** You filed something, refused something, or asked the court for something — and the case changed shortly afterward. Watch especially for the quiet version: they fix a problem you raised without ever admitting there was one.

Mine went in three moves. Three weeks after I moved to dismiss over what the grand jury had been told, the government filed a superseding indictment. It expanded the conduct and the timeframe — and it corrected every inaccurate statement I had challenged. It never acknowledged anything had been wrong. It fixed it and carried on.

Then we started getting ready for trial. My lawyers asked the court to subpoena my witnesses. The government offered a continuance. I said no. I wanted my trial.

That was when the offer came: drop the entire indictment. Not dismiss it — replace it, with a single new charge that had never been in the case. They would let go of all of it. They would not walk away with nothing.

The pattern worth watching for: the case often moves at the exact moment you stop being someone who might settle and become someone who is going to trial.

What you filed or refused / the date / what changed / the date it changed / whether anything was quietly corrected rather than withdrawn

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06 ☐ **They put their reasoning in writing, and it doesn't hold.** Not a slip in a hallway — a reason they actually committed to, in a brief, an email, or on the record.

Mine: the corporate filings name my husband as the owner. The government explained in a brief why it charged me instead. He speaks Spanish; I speak Spanish and English; therefore I was the one running things. Our company is in Hialeah, where more than nine in ten people speak Spanish at home. From the bench the judge said she was not buying it.

What they wrote or said / where it appears / why it doesn't hold

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07 ☐ **What you gave them changed nothing.** Three shapes, and all of them count. They never looked. They looked and dismissed it without saying why. Or they gave you an answer that addressed a different question than the one your document raised.

The third is the most common and the easiest to miss. Write down what your document actually showed, then write down what they said back, then read the two next to each other and see whether the second one answers the first.

What you gave / to whom / when / what they said / what it failed to address

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08 ☐ **Somebody benefited.** A competitor, a rival, a former partner who complained and then took what you had.

Who / what they got / did they speak to the government first **— read the warning on naming companies first**

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09 ☐ **The press release does not match the outcome.** Nearly every federal case gets one, so the release alone proves nothing. What matters is the gap between what it said and what happened. Tick this only if one of these is true.

- It stated allegations as fact rather than as accusations.
- It described conduct the government never proved and never tried.
- It lists charges that were later dismissed, reduced, reversed, or that ended in acquittal.
- It is still online, unchanged, after the case ended.

Mine says I owned and operated the company and was charged in a $19 million scheme. Not alleged — stated. Every one of those charges was dismissed. The word dismissed appears nowhere on the page. It still offers the thrown-out indictment for download and still asks for victim impact statements. It was last updated more than two months after I was sentenced.

Pull up your release / what it claims / what actually happened / the date it was last updated

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Those ticks are your story. Not the word.

Lay them out one at a time and the reader gets there without you. If you still want the word afterward, use it. It hits ten times harder at the end.

WRITE UP THE ONES YOU TICKED

One block each. Dates first, then what happened, then what document would show it. If you do not have the document, write down what it would be called — that is your research list.

Item number _____

WHAT HAPPENED, IN ORDER, WITH DATES

THE DOCUMENT THAT WOULD SHOW IT — OR WHAT IT WOULD BE CALLED

Item number _____

WHAT HAPPENED, IN ORDER, WITH DATES

THE DOCUMENT THAT WOULD SHOW IT — OR WHAT IT WOULD BE CALLED

Item number _____

WHAT HAPPENED, IN ORDER, WITH DATES

THE DOCUMENT THAT WOULD SHOW IT — OR WHAT IT WOULD BE CALLED

Ticked more than three? Use the back of this page. Nobody has ever been hurt by having written too much down.

Five

FOUR THINGS YOU MUST NOT WRITE

Not style notes. Each one costs you something real.

ONE — CONTRADICTING YOUR OWN SWORN WORDS

If you pled guilty, a judge asked whether anyone was forcing you and whether you were acting freely. You said yes. Everyone does — it is the only answer that lets a plea go through, and it is in a transcript anyone can pull.

So "I was forced to plead" gets checked in five minutes, and the contradiction becomes the only thing anyone remembers about you.

But a plea can be legal and still be the worst thing that ever happened to you. Those are not opposites.

Here is what happened to me. Days before trial the government dropped all eight counts and filed a different charge instead — a payroll figure of $54,946 on a loan forgiveness form, from a loan that appeared nowhere in the indictment. The offer came with no prison.

They knew exactly what they were holding. I had five children and a ten-year-old son at home. If I fought and lost, I would not be there. That was not a risk I could take, and they knew it was not a risk I could take.

I do not believe the outcome served justice. The right thing would have been to walk away from the case. The government did walk away — it dropped every count in that indictment and has never explained why. It simply replaced them with something else rather than admitting the indictment should never have been brought.

Here is how to say all of that without taking back a word you said under oath.

IN HER OWN WORDS

I was given a choice that was not a real choice. It was like handing over your wallet at gunpoint. You reach into your pocket, you place it in their hand. Technically, you gave it to them.

ANGELICA PACHECO, ON WHY SHE PLEADED GUILTY

Nothing in that contradicts anything she said under oath. It is not a legal claim at all. It is a description, and it is far more damaging to the government than the sentence she was not allowed to write.

Then give the two numbers — what they offered, what you faced — and stop. The reader does the arithmetic.

TWO — NAMING A PERSON AND CALLING THEM A CRIMINAL

"The office charged me three weeks after I filed my complaint" is a date and a fact. "Prosecutor Smith is corrupt" is an accusation of a crime against a named person, and it exposes you to a defamation suit.

It also does nothing for you. A reader already on your side did not need it. A reader who was not just stopped listening.

Say **the government.** You lose nothing. Everyone knows who you mean.

There is a better move available. If a judge criticised the government on the record in your case, quote **the judge.** It is the system saying it instead of you, and nobody can call it bias.

> *Unless someone has a birth certificate that says Patient One, no. This isn't, like, some phantom clinic, right. Part of the defense is these people were really being treated. So how can you be giving her an exhibit list that just says Patient One?*
>
> JUDGE JACQUELINE BECERRA TO THE GOVERNMENT, TRANSCRIPT, 8 JANUARY 2026

Angelica could not have written a line half that strong about her own case. She did not have to. She found it in a transcript.

THREE — NAMING A COMPANY AS HAVING COME AFTER YOU

THIS IS THE ONE PEOPLE UNDERESTIMATE

A company will sue you, and it does not have to win. It only has to file. Defending a defamation suit runs into six figures before anything is decided. That is the weapon, not the verdict.

Write the sequence instead. *The complaint was filed on March 3. The referral is dated March 19. The indictment followed on June 4.* Dates from documents. No sentence explaining why. The reader connects them and you never made an accusation.

FOUR — ANYTHING AIMED AT IDENTIFIED VICTIMS

Whatever you believe about how the case was built, attacking the people the government called harmed ends the conversation. Every reader you wanted is gone in one sentence.

There is a version that works, and it is a fact rather than an attack. In Angelica's case the government solicited victim impact statements for more than a year. None was ever filed. None was presented at sentencing. When the Court asked whether anyone wished to be heard, nobody came forward.

She never said a word about a victim. She counted how many turned up.

Six

THE NUMBER THAT TRAVELS

If you get one thing in front of people, make it a comparison.

Charged: $19.1 million, eight counts. Convicted: one count, $54,946. Between those two numbers, no trial and no explanation.

That travels through people who disagree with you about everything else, because it asks nothing of them. No adjective. No motive. No accusation.

Anger reaches people who already agree with you. Disproportion, stated as a number, crosses lines.

What are your two numbers?

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Charged against convicted. Offered against exposure. Yours against a
co-defendant's. Whichever gap is widest.
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Seven

THE RULE YOU CANNOT BEND

Never fill in a detail you do not actually remember.

Not a date. Not a number. Not a quote.

If you are not sure it was March, write "in the spring." If you are not sure whether he said cell or prison, write "he said something about me being locked up by Christmas — I don't remember the exact word."

That sounds weaker. It is not. A reader trusts someone who admits uncertainty about small things; it is how they know you are straight about the large ones.

And the reverse is brutal. Guess a date, have someone check it, and the wrong date becomes the story. Not your case. The wrong date.

Real numbers have texture. A volunteer log showing **2,099.5 hours** is believable in a way that "over two thousand hours" is not. That half hour is the proof somebody kept a record.

Eight

QUESTIONS, WHEN YOU ARE STUCK

Do not try to write "my statement." Answer these. Shape it later.

Where were you when you found out? What were you doing an hour later?

What did you have to tell your children, and how did you say it?

Angelica's answer: her son is ten. He tells her she has the most beautiful pickle eyes, because they are green. She thought about the grief she would cause him if she fought and lost. That was the only thing that mattered.

Where were you when you decided? Who was in the room? How long did you have?

What did you lose that was not money?

Who asked for help on your behalf, and what happened?

Angelica's daughter set up a fundraiser to hire her mother a defense lawyer. After seven days it had raised $505 against a $100,000 goal. The Court found her indigent and appointed a public defender.

Describe one ordinary day from before. Start to finish.

This matters more than people expect. A reader has to see you as a person before anything else means anything. Angelica's: picking up donated bread from Publix between five and six in the morning, in her own car, on her own gas, three days a week.

Nine

WHERE TO SEND IT

Once your account is written and the documents are attached, it is worth something. Here is where it can go, and an honest word about each one.

START WITH YOUR OWN REPRESENTATIVE

Every member of the House and every senator runs constituent casework. It is the most underused door in the country and the only one where a staffer is assigned to read what you send. Find your representative at **house.gov** and your senators at **senate.gov**. Ask for the caseworker who handles federal agencies. Send the summary, not the whole file — one page, dates, and an offer to provide everything else.

HOUSE AND SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEES

Both have oversight jurisdiction over the Justice Department. The House select subcommittee that was specifically named for weaponization dissolved in January 2025; the full committees remain. Committees act on patterns rather than individual cases, so what gets read is a case that illustrates something larger than itself. That is exactly what a well-documented account does.

DOJ OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

Takes complaints about Justice Department employees at **oig.justice.gov**. Be aware that allegations about a prosecutor's handling of a case are typically referred onward to the Office of Professional Responsibility.

DOJ OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The office that reviews federal prosecutors. You should know the odds before you spend hope on it: in fiscal year 2022 it processed 397 matters and made 14 findings of professional misconduct, and its reports do not name the attorneys involved. Send it anyway. A complaint that is never filed is never counted.

THE STATE BAR WHERE THE PROSECUTOR IS LICENSED

A separate channel from anything inside the Department, with its own rules and its own timeline. Ask a lawyer whether your facts fit before you file.

IF YOU HAVE A CONVICTION: THE OFFICE OF THE PARDON ATTORNEY

Clemency petitions go through **justice.gov/pardon**. The forms are public and free. Nobody needs to be paid to file one for you.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK ON THIS

The National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers publishes on the trial penalty and overcriminalization. The Institute for Justice works on civil forfeiture. Both take an interest in cases that illustrate what they already document. Neither is a law firm for your case.

AND A REPORTER

Be honest with yourself: this is the one most likely to change anything. Not a national desk first — a local reporter who has covered your courthouse, or a beat reporter who writes about federal prosecutions. Send the one-page summary and the documents. Reporters do not want your conclusion. They want a record they can check, which is the thing you now have.

You do not need permission from any of them to publish your own account.

PUBLISH IT YOURSELF

Nobody's permission is required. Every case on our site exists because somebody decided to stop waiting for an institution to care.

That is literally how this started. Ed Rosenberg was in the middle of his own federal case when he began writing up other people's, in his own name, using X's long-form article feature. People found him. He found others. He kept a list, and the order stories were added to that list is why each of us has the case number we have. There was no organization. There was a man posting articles.

Put it wherever people are. An article on X. A post on Facebook. A video. A blog nobody reads yet. Tag it **#43Americans** — not because it belongs to us, but because it is how the people in this situation find each other, and how we found each other.

Get the facts straight first. Then publish everywhere.

WHAT YOUR LAWYER WILL PROBABLY SAY

Most attorneys will tell you not to speak publicly while anything is still open. **Listen to them.** That advice is almost always right about your case, because silence carries no legal risk and speaking does.

But understand what that advice is measuring and what it is not. Your lawyer is protecting your case. Nobody in that room is protecting your name. While you stay quiet, the government's version is the only one that exists, it sits at the top of every search for you, and no rule requires anyone to ever correct it.

Both of those things are true at once. So separate the two decisions.

Do the work now. Every checkbox, every document, every date. None of that is publishing and none of it carries risk.

Publish when your lawyer says you can. That may be after sentencing, after an appeal, after supervised release ends. It may be years. When the day comes you will not be starting from an empty page and a memory that has faded — you will already have it built.

And if you are past all of it, with nothing pending, ask your lawyer plainly what the remaining risk actually is. Sometimes the honest answer is: none, and I just always say no.

Ten

HOW TO WORK

1. **Do the nine ticks first.** That alone is most of the work.
2. **Answer whichever questions you can.** Skip the rest.
3. **List what you wish you could prove.** Half-remembered dates, transcripts you never got, a sentence somebody mentioned. Most of it is findable through dockets and public filings.
4. **Write it rough.** Long is fine. Angry is fine. Get it out.
5. **Then cut every sentence that states a conclusion** and check whether the facts around it already deliver it. Usually they do.
6. **Check whether the law changed.** Courts have thrown out several federal theories in recent years. Take your statute, the subsection, and the year to a lawyer and ask directly. Short question, large answer.
7. **Have a lawyer read it before you publish anything.**

BEFORE YOU PUBLISH A WORD

If you have a pending appeal, a habeas petition, supervised release, probation, restitution proceedings, or cooperation obligations — talk to your attorney first.

Anything you publish is permanent and can be quoted back at you in a future proceeding. That is not a reason to stay silent. It is a reason to have someone read it who knows your case.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Help us
draw the line.

We are a growing set of documented federal cases, published in full from primary sources and open for anyone to check. We started with forty-three. We built the site because there was nowhere else the record could sit.

Drawing the line does not mean winning your case. It means putting it down accurately, in public, where it can be counted. One documented account is a complaint. A hundred of them, each one checkable, is a pattern — and a pattern is the thing that cannot be waved away as somebody bitter about a verdict.

There will come a point when this is too well documented to keep dismissing. Every story told properly moves that point closer. That is the whole strategy, and it does not require anyone's permission.

Yours may belong there too. Write your story. If it holds up against the documents, we will consider publishing it. We cannot promise to take every case and we cannot give legal advice or legal help. What we can do is put a documented account somewhere it cannot be quietly deleted.

WHAT WE CAN PUBLISH

1. It is specific — dates, rooms, documents, numbers.
2. It separates what you saw, what is on paper, and what you believe.
3. It contradicts nothing you said under oath.
4. It names no individual as a criminal and no company as an attacker.
5. **It comes with the documents.** Indictment, plea agreement, judgment, sentencing transcript, press release, docket entries. A story without paper behind it cannot go on the site, however true it is.

That last rule is not bureaucracy. One unsupported claim can be used to discredit every other case on the site. The documents are what make you impossible to dismiss.

WHY SHE WROTE THIS

I keep asking what the government accomplished. How is society better? I know this pain is not in vain if something good can come from it. That is why I fight — not just for me.

ANGELICA PACHECO · CASE 43

A registered nurse for twenty years. In the middle of the prosecution she went back to college for the bachelor's degree she needed in order to apply to law school. She finished it. She is going, because of what happened to her.

FOLLOW. SHARE. MAKE US HARD TO IGNORE.

YOUTUBE	@43americans
FACEBOOK	43 Americans
INSTAGRAM	@43americans
X	search #43Americans
THE RECORD	250pardons.com

#43AMERICANS

When justice goes silent, we go louder.

Say it as hot as you want. Just make it specific.
Nobody can argue with what you saw.

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Not legal advice. This guide cannot tell you whether anything unlawful happened in your case, whether you have a claim, or what to do next. Nothing in it creates an attorney-client relationship. Consult a licensed attorney about your own situation.

Quotations from Judge Becerra are verbatim from the transcript named. Details of Angelica Pacheco's case are drawn from the public docket in United States v. Angelica Pacheco, S.D. Fla., and are documented in full at 250pardons.com/angelica-pacheco.