

Sentence stands in fatal Iron 44 helicopter crash

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A judge has denied an attempt by a former Grants Pass helicopter company executive to revisit his 12-year prison sentence over falsified aircraft records that led to a crash that killed seven Southern Oregon firefighters in the summer of 2008.

Steven Metheny, 50, formerly vice president of now-defunct Carson Helicopters, is incarcerated in Lompoc, California.

He argued last year that he wouldn't have pleaded guilty in November 2014

to a count of conspiracy to commit mail fraud and wire fraud in U.S. District Court in Medford for lying about helicopter weight limits — which caused the Aug. 5, 2008, Iron 44 crash near Weaverville, California — had he known crash victims were going to be allowed to testify at his sentencing, or that he'd be ordered to repay tens of millions of dollars in restitution upon release from prison.

In a 13-page court order filed May 27, U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken denied [Metheny's motion](#) to vacate or correct his [June 2015 sentence](#), saying it doesn't match Metheny's allegations of ineffective counsel by his defense lawyer, Steven Meyers, nor does it match the court record.

Meyers provided a statement to the court that said he believed, and continues to believe, that Metheny's judgment should have been zero dollars — which would have given Metheny a maximum 10 months in prison rather than the 151-month sentence imposed — but the lawyer denies ever mischaracterizing the potential outcomes.

"I never promised Mr. Metheny or gave him personal assurances that the court would find the loss amount would be zero," Meyers wrote, adding that he "clearly informed him that the court would make the ultimate decision."

The document Metheny signed to change his plea to guilty stated that he understood only a judge would decide his sentence, which carried a maximum penalty of 20 years. Metheny said under oath in 2014 "that he had not been given any other promises of leniency," according to Aiken's order.

The loss amount was "vigorously argued" in June 2015, according to Aiken, with records showing federal prosecutors countering Metheny's arguments of zero dollars in losses with an argument for \$51.7 million. The court ultimately sentenced Metheny to [12-1/2 years in prison](#) for attempting to defraud the government out of more than \$32 million.

Meyers further told the court he was never asked by Metheny to withdraw his Nov. 24, 2014, guilty plea.

Metheny claimed that his defense lawyer was ineffective for letting victims speak at his sentencing hearing, but Aiken noted that the record shows his defense lawyers objected to their testimony, and U.S. District Court Judge Mark Clarke overruled it.

Aiken drew from the court record, which shows that when Clarke asked him before sentencing whether there was anything he wished to say before sentencing, "Metheny gave a lengthy statement in which he took 'full responsibility for the actions I did in preparation of the U.S. Forest Service contract in the spring of '08.'"

"Metheny did not indicate he had been promised a loss amount of zero," Aiken wrote.

She called the former executive's claims that his defense lawyer made false promises prior to his guilty plea "palpably incredible."

"Viewed against the record, Metheny's claims concerning Meyers' alleged promises are palpably incredible and no [further] hearing is required," Aiken wrote. "The court cannot find that Meyers rendered ineffective assistance as Metheny's trial counsel," either in terms of informing Metheny of the risk concerning the disputed amount of loss, or in negotiating the plea agreement."

On Wednesday, Metheny filed notice that he plans to appeal Aiken's ruling with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Aiken's ruling stated a judge's ruling on motions to vacate or correct sentences may only be appealed if a judge determines a juror could

reasonably debate that the case could've been resolved in a different manner by issuing a "certificate of appealability." Aiken declined to issue such a certificate in her May 27 ruling.

Federal Bureau of Prison records show that Metheny is one of 996 male inmates at the low security Federal Correctional Institution Lompoc in Santa Barbara County, California. He is scheduled to be released May 6, 2026.

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