

# The Rise, Reckoning, and Rupture of Sheila Cherfilus McCormick

*A narrative account based on the Ethics Committee's findings*

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Sheila Cherfilus McCormick entered Congress with the kind of improbable momentum that turns local candidates into national stories. A daughter of Haitian immigrants, a health care executive, and a relentless campaigner, she carved her way into Florida's 20th Congressional District after the death of longtime Rep. Alcee Hastings. Her victory was narrow, expensive, and hard fought — but it was also historic. She became the first Haitian American Democrat elected to Congress, a symbol of representation long overdue.

For a moment, it looked like she was building a new political dynasty in South Florida.

But Washington has a way of turning triumph into scrutiny, and scrutiny into crisis.

## A Promising Start Meets a Growing Shadow

From the beginning, Cherfilus McCormick's political ascent was intertwined with money — how much she raised, how much she loaned herself, and how aggressively she funded her campaigns. Her 2021 special election bid was fueled by millions in personal loans, a strategy that helped her outspend rivals but also raised eyebrows.

Still, she won. And for a time, the questions quieted.

Then came the investigations.

## The Ethics Committee Steps In

By 2024, whispers had become formal inquiries. The House Ethics Committee — a bipartisan body known for moving slowly and speaking sparingly — launched a probe into whether Cherfilus McCormick had misused federal funds connected to disaster relief programs.

The allegations were serious: that she had improperly directed or benefited from **millions in federal disaster relief dollars**, and that some of those funds were used to support her political campaign. The Committee also examined whether she had failed to properly disclose financial information, misrepresented the nature of certain transactions, or blurred the lines between public resources and political ambition.

For months, the investigation unfolded quietly. Then, in a rare move, the Committee held a **public hearing** — a sign that the evidence was substantial and the stakes were high.

## The Verdict: 25 Ethics Violations

When the findings were released, they landed like a thunderclap.

The Committee concluded that Rep. Sheila Cherfilus McCormick had **violated 25 ethics rules** — an extraordinary number for any sitting mem-



Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Fla., appears for the House Ethics Committee trial Thursday, March 26, 2026. The panel announced Friday, March 27, Cherfilus-McCormick was found guilty of 25 ethics charges for allegedly stealing millions in FEMA money and using it for her campaign. Andrew Harnik / Getty Images

ber of Congress. The violations centered on:

- **Misuse of federal disaster relief funds**, including allegations that millions intended for emergency assistance were diverted or misapplied.
- **Improper financial conduct** connected to her 2021 campaign.
- **Failures in disclosure and transparency**, including incomplete or misleading financial statements.
- **Conduct unbecoming of a member of Congress**, a broad category that encompasses actions that undermine public trust.

The Committee did not find her guilty on two of the 27 charges — but the overwhelming majority stood.

Members of her own party, including Reps. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez and Vicente Gonzalez, publicly called for her resignation, marking a rare moment of intraparty rebuke.

## A Career at a Crossroads

Cherfilus McCormick denied wrongdoing. She insisted that the allegations were politically motivated, that the Committee had misinterpreted her actions, and that she had always acted in good faith. Her supporters echoed this, arguing that she was being targeted because she was a newcomer, a disruptor, and a Black woman representing a district long shaped by entrenched political interests.

But the Ethics Committee's findings — and the looming possibility of an expulsion vote — placed her in the most precarious position of her political life.

## The Human Cost Behind the Headlines

Behind the legal language and political maneuvering is a more intimate story: a first generation American who rose quickly, governed boldly, and now faces the possibility of a historic downfall. Her constituents, many of whom saw her as a symbol of representation and possibility, are left navigating disappointment, confusion, and uncertainty about what comes next.

And in Washington, where scandal is currency and accountability is often selective, her case has become a flashpoint — a test of how Congress handles alleged misconduct within its own ranks, and whether the standards applied to one member will be applied to all.

## Where the Story Goes from Here

The Ethics Committee will reconvene after recess to determine next steps. Expulsion requires a two thirds vote — a threshold rarely met in American history. But the political winds are shifting, and the pressure is mounting.

For now, Sheila Cherfilus McCormick remains in Congress, fighting to defend her name, her seat, and her legacy.

Her story is still being written.

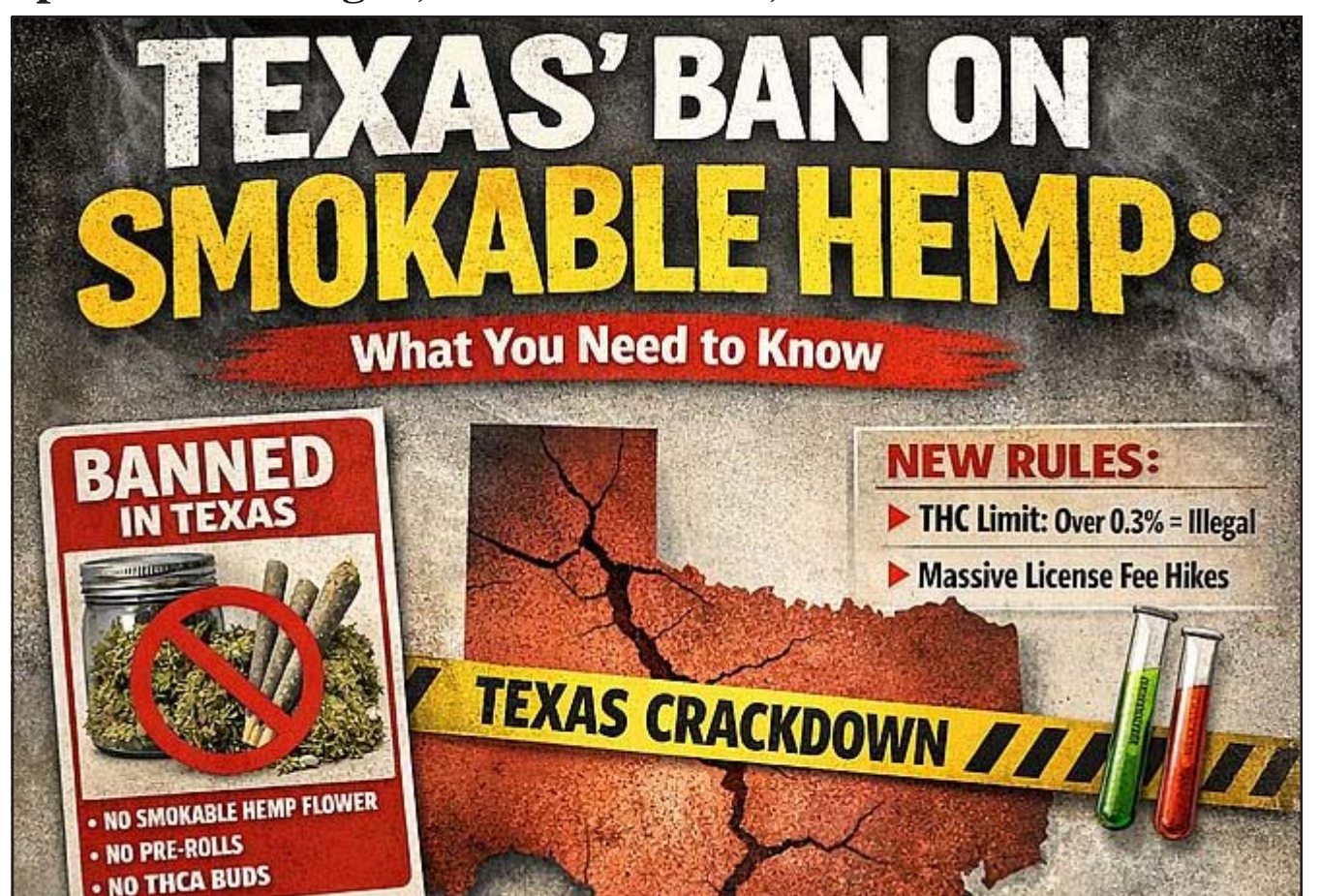
## Texas's Ban on Smokable Hemp: What Changed, Who's Affected, and What Comes Next

By Villager staff

(VILLAGER) - Texas has quietly enacted one of the most sweeping crackdowns on the state's hemp industry since legalization in 2019, and the effects are immediate. As of March 31, new rules from the Department of State Health Services have effectively eliminated all natural smokable hemp products from the legal market. The state did not pass a legislative ban; instead, regulators rewrote the rules in ways that industry leaders say achieve the same outcome. By lowering the allowable threshold of total THC to 0.3 percent and requiring labs to measure all THC forms—not just Delta 9—the state has rendered popular products like THCA flower and pre rolled joints noncompliant. These items make up more than half the inventory for many shops, and their removal represents a seismic shift for retailers and consumers alike. The rules also codify a purchasing age of 21, expand testing and labeling requirements, and impose extensive bookkeeping obligations that smaller shops say they cannot meet.

The financial impact is just as severe. Licensing fees for manufacturers have jumped from \$258 to \$10,000 per facility, and retail registration fees have risen from \$155 to \$5,000. Business owners describe these increases as a targeted squeeze designed to force closures, especially in rural areas where shops operate on thin margins. One manufacturer told reporters that regulators had “done a ban with their own regulatory scheme,” arguing that the state has chosen to eliminate legal products rather than enforce existing safety standards. Many in the industry say they welcomed age verification, child resistant packaging, and clearer labeling, but they view the THC cap and fee hikes as punitive measures that go far beyond consumer protection.

Consumers, meanwhile, face a confusing landscape. Possession of smokable hemp remains legal, and attorneys emphasize that Texans will not be committing a crime by carrying or using these products. But because hemp and marijuana are visually indistinguishable and field tests cannot differentiate them, lawyers expect a wave of mistaken ar-



rests as law enforcement agencies misinterpret the new rules. Retailers are rushing to clear inventory, but they cannot sell to out of state customers, leaving many with thousands of dollars in unsellable product. Some warn that the crackdown will push half the legal market into illicit channels, where products are untested and unregulated, undermining the very safety goals state officials claim to prioritize.

State leaders and youth focused advocacy groups argue that the restrictions are necessary to protect children from high THC products that have become widely accessible. They point to a rise in cannabis related poison control calls since 2019, though experts caution that such increases are common after legalization and require more context before drawing conclusions. Lawmakers attempted a full ban last year, citing concerns that the THCA loophole had created a de facto recreational market without legislative approval. Although the governor vetoed that bill, he directed agencies to

tighten regulations, and these rules are the result. Supporters of the fee increases say the billion dollar hemp industry should bear the cost of oversight and the “societal burden” associated with intoxicating products.

The future of the industry is uncertain. A coalition of hemp businesses is preparing to sue the state, continuing a legal battle that began in 2021 when regulators attempted to outlaw Delta 8. Attorneys expect consumers to seek out semi synthetic or chemically converted products that appear compliant on paper, while edibles and beverages—regulated separately by the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission—may temporarily fill the gap. But advocates warn that demand for smokable products will not disappear, and the state's attempt to regulate them out of existence may simply drive Texans toward untested alternatives. As one attorney put it, people who want to smoke will “find something that appears compliant,” even if it is less safe than what the state just banned.