

## Savitt won't dole out inheritance unless objection is withdrawn

LOCAL By John Pacenti - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



James Vassallo holds a photo of his parents, Albert Vassallo Sr. and Geraldine Mickey Vassallo, in November 2015. His father was a senior "ward" of Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt, wife of Circuit Judge Martin Colin. (John Pacenti/The Palm Beach Post)

Posted: 8:27 p.m. Friday, May 12, 2017

Professional guardian Elizabeth Savitt has threatened to withhold the last of a family's inheritance unless an objection to her conduct filed in court is withdrawn. She also said she would decrease the remainder of the inheritance — about \$200,000 — if she has to fight the objection in court.

Savitt was the court-appointed guardian for Albert Vassallo Sr., who died in November. She has distributed about \$400,000 of the inheritance to six relatives, but the remaining money is tied up in two investment bonds. She has been the subject of several complaints by other families of incapacitated seniors and is being investigated by the state Office of Public and Professional Guardians.

Savitt this past month proposed in an e-mail that four of the Vassallo heirs give up a total \$54,000 to Susan Mast, a sibling who had taken about \$130,000 from her father prior to the guardianship, according to court documents. James Vassallo, a brother, filed an objection with the guardianship court.

"Savitt continues to engage in a pattern of behavior which tends to treat the person accused of harming the ward more favorably than other beneficiaries," the objection read.

To increase the pressure on James Vassallo, Savitt sent another e-mail to the heirs on Friday saying, "We are asking the court for sanctions and fees for filing scandalous allegations, false and frivolous claims. Also remember, no e-mail was ever sent to James asking him to donate money to Susan."

In the original email, Savitt said Mast contends she is owed \$128,000 for the care of her father before the guardianship when the senior lived right next to James in Century Village in Deerfield Beach. During that time, the Veterans Administration recognized James Vassallo as his father's caretaker, he

said.

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"These people in the guardianship racket are like cockroaches. They just don't go away," James Vassallo said.

The sister, Susan Mast, has benefited from Savitt as guardian in other ways.

**Under a December 2014 settlement**, Mast would have to pay back only \$62,000 of the money she took and didn't have to pay it back immediately. She also didn't have to account for missing assets in her father's savings deposit box or his vehicle that were listed in a demand letter from Savitt to Mast.

Savitt also placed the elder Vassallo in Mast's home and paid her about \$2,800 a month to care for him.

Another brother who took about \$50,000 from his father prior to the guardianship also did not have to pay back the money immediately under the settlement.

Savitt and Mast have refused to comment.

In the e-mail received by the Vassallo family on Thursday, Savitt said that her lawyers have informed her the objection to "voluntary contributions" to Mast by five of the siblings means that she doesn't have to distribute the \$200,000 until the guardianship is closed.

"I have sent James' lawyer through my lawyer a letter asking him to withdraw his objections because they are frivolous and he has not done so yet," Savitt wrote in the e-mail.

"If he doesn't withdraw the objections, we will have to litigate them in the guardianship case and I will need to use the trust funds to fund that litigation and anything the court orders as a result."

James Vassallo said he feels if he withdraws the objection, then Savitt will funnel inheritance money to his sister. He said the family had to agree to forgo a review of Savitt's accounting of their father's guardianship in order to get the initial payment.

"We want all this stuff over with and she won't end it," Vassallo said. "She needs to go to a judge and explain why she is not giving us the money."

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