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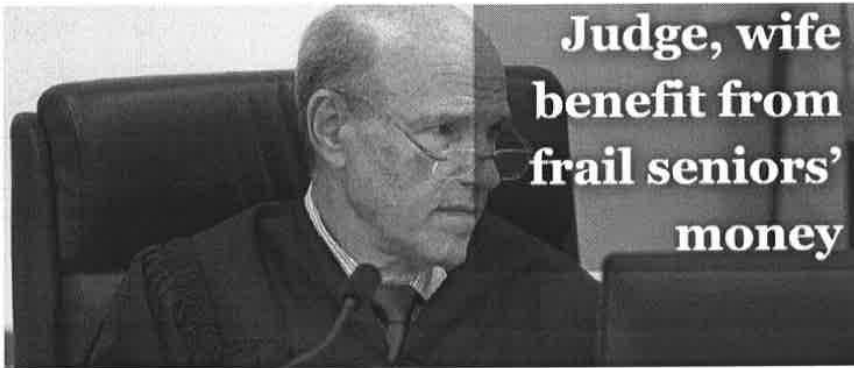
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Florida: Judge, wife benefit from frail seniors' money, Part 1

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Judge Martin Colin hears guardianship cases, but not those of his wife. However, he hears other cases involving her lawyers. A former Florida high court justice says it looks improper and could violate the Judicial Code of Conduct. Judge Martin Colin, a fixture at the south county courthouse, was admonished by an appeals court in 2007 for conflicts involving Savitt after he represented her in her divorce. (Madellne Gray / The Palm Beach Post)

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The first in a series of articles from Florida's Palm Beach Post, written by John Pacenti, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer, and produced by Kristyn Wellesley and Gurman Bhatia

The savings of incapacitated seniors flow into the household of Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Martin Colin.

This occurs courtesy of Colin's wife — Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt. She serves as a professional guardian, appointed by judges to make decisions for adults who no longer can take care of themselves.

Savitt makes her money off the nest eggs of the elderly, many suffering from dementia and put in guardianships in the same Probate & Guardianship Division where Judge Colin wields considerable influence. His fellow judges approve Savitt's fees.

Savitt has taken money from the elderly people whose lives she controls without first getting a judge's approval as well as double-billed their accounts, a Palm Beach Post investigation has uncovered in court records. Families of some of the seniors say the judge's wife and her attorneys drum up unnecessary litigation that runs up fees, benefiting herself, the judge and her lawyers.

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'I'm the wife of a Judge': Some families say Elizabeth Savitt, a professional guardian, cites her husband's position when they complain. (Madeline Gray / The Palm Beach Post)

Savitt doesn't appear before her husband, but Judge Colin does oversee other guardianship cases where he is responsible for safeguarding the finances and well-being of these "wards" of the court. Colin's colleague, Circuit Judge David French who lunches with him regularly, has overseen almost two-thirds of Savitt's cases. Some lawyers who have opposed Savitt in Judge French's courtroom say he didn't disclose that Savitt is the wife of a fellow judge or his social connections to the couple.

The lawyers Savitt has hired to represent her also practiced before her husband in other cases, where he had the power to approve their fees. A former Florida Supreme Court chief justice and a law professor say this constitutes, at minimum, an appearance of impropriety and should be investigated.

"This conflict puts the whole courthouse under a cloud because it raises so many questions and there are no answers forthcoming. And that is why we have a judicial canon on the appearance of impropriety, so there are no questions like this," Nova Southeastern law Professor Robert Jarvis said.

The guardianship arena is an attorney's playground. Everyone – the elderly ward, the guardian, relatives of the senior – are lawyered up. And most, if not all, get paid out of the savings of the senior in guardianship.

Families wonder if their lawyers naturally would be gun shy in opposing Savitt, a wife of a judge who they must appear in front of in other, more lucrative, cases.



Lunches with husband: Judge David French hears the majority of Savitt's cases. He lunches with her husband every day. (Damon Higgins/The Palm Beach Post)

This isn't the first time Colin has had a conflict involving his wife and her lawyers. An appeals court in 2007 **barred the judge** from presiding over a case involving Savitt's divorce lawyers, ruling he had an "apparent conflict of interest that would cause a reasonable litigant to have a well-grounded fear of not receiving a fair trial."

115 Recusals in 6 months

This elaborate dance plays out in south county in the lucrative Probate & Guardianship Division, where Colin is a longtime sitting judge.

His wife's job as a professional guardian leaves Judge Colin compromised, handcuffing him from fully doing his job, The Post found. He's recused himself from 115 cases that involve his wife's lawyers in the last six months of 2015 after The Post started asking questions in its investigation.

"When you have a judge suddenly recuse himself of so many cases, it certainly sends up a red flag," Jarvis said. "How did a judge allow himself to be put in such a position? I have never heard of a judge doing such a thing."

But Judge Colin doesn't see a problem. Even before his recent mass recusals, he remarked in a court hearing that in the past he had required his wife's attorneys to tell opposing lawyers that they represented Savitt.

But at least one attorney told The Post that's not always how it worked. Gary Susser gave an

example in which Colin's disclosure policy fell short, saying he was "floored and shocked" when he found out about the conflict.

Attorney Sheri Hazeltine didn't tell Susser until April that she works for Savitt, almost a year into a probate case, Susser said.

"She never disclosed her relationship until she was told by Judge Colin to do so," he said. "It's a huge concern for me when opposing counsel represents the judge's wife."

A transcript of the hearing shows Colin asking Hazeltine to disclose, she does so and then Susser objected to Colin continuing to preside over the case.

"It was news to me what I just found out," Susser tells Colin.

Colin responds, "OK. That's why we make what we call a disclosure."

"Yeah," Susser responds.

Colin then defends the policy that he would change later in the summer: "Can't disclose until it's, you know, ripe to disclose," he tells Susser.

Colin had the case reassigned to another judge.

The judge spoke to The Post for hours, but because of his position, was limited in what he could say. He would only say on the record that he has dealt with the conflict with his wife properly through established methods.

.... To be continued....

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Guardian Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt John Pacenti Judge David French
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Sam Sugar, co-founder of Americans Against Abusive Probate Guardianships, says state bills to rein in professional guardians have wide support this legislative session.

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The second in a series of articles from Florida's Palm Beach Post, written by John Pacenti, Palm Beach Post Staff Writer, and produced by Kristyn Wellesley and Gurman Bhatia

Read Judge, wife benefit from frail seniors' money, Part 1, here.

How do you convince a god he is wrong?

The nation as a whole is beset by unscrupulous guardians, some of whom have been charged with crimes. Florida passed its first effort at reform last legislative session, including applying criminal penalties to guardians found guilty of abuse. Advocates say legislative reform, though, means nothing if judges are complicit in draining the life savings of seniors in guardianships.

Judges like Colin are the main line of defense against guardianship abuse.

Colin, 66, is one of a handful of judges in Palm Beach County Circuit Court who oversee guardians for incapacitated adults. When a senior is found to be incapacitated, they lose all legal rights to make decisions for themselves. So these judges approve expenditures including fees for the guardian and the guardian's attorney — again all coming from the senior's money.

"The problems all arise from the judges and the lawyers and the greed-driven abusive guardians they enable," said Dr. Sam Sugar, co-founder of Americans Against Abusive Probate

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Guardianship, which spearheaded the Florida legislation.

"Judges are extremely insulated. They are legal gods who live in a court bubble in which they only believe what their friendly guardians tell them. I mean how do you convince a god that he or she is wrong? It's a near incestuous fraternity."

The final arbiter for judges' behavior is the Florida Supreme Court. A former chief justice says Colin's conflict needs to be investigated.

"If you are sitting on the bench, you should not be doing things that would put a question in the minds of the public," said Gerald Kogan, who served on the high court from 1987 to 1998.

Judge's history of debt: Foreclosures, IRS liens

Colin and Savitt are positioned as the power couple of the lucrative probate arena. Colin's financial history, however, is littered with debt, including suits for foreclosure on three properties and \$65,000 once owed to the IRS for back taxes.

Savitt also had a recent foreclosure on a property. The couple's financial problems appear to have eased since she became a professional guardian.

Financial records show Savitt's finances are mainly separate from the judge's, but it appears the couple has co-mingled finances at least somewhat, West Palm Beach accountant Richard Rampell said. He pointed to a co-signed \$30,000 loan from Helen Rich, a Wrigley chewing gum heiress who was a former client of Colin's when he practiced as a divorce lawyer.



Photo of Judge Martin Colin's home in Atlantis that was the subject of foreclosure actions indicative of the judge's financial troubles. Address is 501 N. Country Club Drive. Judge Colin was sued for foreclosure in 2009 but told The Post it was a mortgage modification.

And even with couples who keep their finances separate, there is bound to be overlap, Rampell said.

"It's very common, especially if one makes more money than other. And even if they say they don't, they often do," Rampell.

Sugar puts it simply: "Any money she collects would essentially be money he collects."

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Retired teacher Helen O'Grady, who died at 83 in 2012 in Boynton Beach, was a senior "ward" of professional guardlan Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt, wife of Circuit Judge Martin Colin.

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Read Judge's history of debt: Foreclosures, IRS liens, Part 2, here.

A majority of professional guardians aren't looking to line their pockets.

They can be a godsend, taking over the decision-making for families fighting over a failing relative. But the salvation can be costly. Many of these seniors have substantial savings, and without proper oversight, a guardianship can become a fee frenzy.

Because the cases are in probate, Florida law requires every party to the case to have a lawyer. Many lawyers rely on the judge to approve their fees, paid from the senior's bank account.

Florida judicial canons are explicit in barring judges from appearing to use the bench for their own or their family's benefit.

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A judge shall not allow family, social, political or other relationships to influence the judge's judicial conduct or judgment. A judge shall not lend the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others. – Canon 2(b) – Florida Judicial Code of Conduct

Former Chief Justice Kogan suggests Colin's and Savitt's conflict could violate the Florida Judicial Code of Conduct and should trigger an investigation by the Judicial Qualifications Commission.

"If I were somebody associated with the JQC, this is something I definitely would want to look into. It gives, if nothing else, an appearance of impropriety," he said.

The JQC has the power to recommend to the Florida high court punishment for judges — from a private reprimand to sanctions to removal from the bench.

Kogan and **Raoul Cantero**, another former high court justice, wonder why Palm Beach County's chief judge didn't remove Colin from the probate division.

"If I were the chief judge, I wouldn't put up with this type of thing because it looks terrible, not only to members of the public but also to members of the legal profession," Kogan said.

Cantero agreed: "One way to handle that as an administrative matter is to have that judge in a division where those conflicts don't occur."

In Palm Beach County, two chief judges have been in a position to move Colin since his wife became a professional guardian in 2011. **But each presided at one time over her divorce case, when Colin was her attorney and her lover.**

'Savitt wasted our money for her personal gain'

Families say they watched slack-jawed as Savitt, 60, and her lawyers siphoned the wealth of their loved ones. They feel they are rendered powerless by judges who rule repeatedly for the judge's wife. Families fighting Savitt say Colin's colleagues allow her and her attorneys to pursue what critics of guardianships call "staged litigation" — pursuit of unnecessary legal issues to run up fees.



Retired teacher Helen O'Grady, who died at 83 in 2012 in Boynton Beach, was a senior "ward" of professional guardian Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt, wife of Circuit Judge Martin Colin.

"It's his wife, Betsy Savitt, and her attorneys who wasted our family money and time for their personal gain through billing hours due to sibling infighting," said Thomas Mayes, who fought off Savitt's effort to claim \$55,000 from the estate of his mother, Helen O'Grady. "I feel she helps herself and her attorneys and not the client nor the ward of the court."

The seniors might be incapacitated, but some are

dubious of the judge's wife. Albert Vassallo Sr., a retired Brooklyn plumber who is one of Savitt's wards, spoke to The Post at a Deerfield Beach senior center.

"The only one taking money from me is that woman. But I'm going to get on that," he said. "I wish I could stop her."

.... To be continued....

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Former Florida Supreme Court Justice Gerald Kogan

Former Florida Supreme Court Justice Raoul Cantero Judicial Qualifications Commission

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Ellen Morris, attorney for court-appointed guardian John Cramer who works for Savitt, has also practiced in front of Savitt's husband, Judge Colln (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

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Read Judge appears to routinely violate Florida Judicial Code of Conduct , Part 3, here.

The conflict created for Colin by his wife working as a professional guardian is a frequent topic of conversation among probate and elder law attorneys. But many told The Post that they fear reprisals for themselves or their clients if they speak on the record about Colin, particularly on matters involving his wife.

"I blame the courts because they have allowed this culture," said one attorney, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "Savitt acts with impunity because she has the wind behind her."

Probate attorney Edward Shipe said Colin's conflict of interest at the very least "doesn't look right, doesn't feel right."

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"I can't sit here and deny that," Shipe said. "So we got this wife and she wanted to do guardianship cases so she started a guardianship business. It was talked about before it happened. I was scratching my head a little bit, thinking, 'You are going to have problems doing this.'"

Professor Jarvis questioned whether attorneys who represent Savitt hope to get an edge in front of Colin.

"Are they doing this either to curry favor with Judge Colin or to avoid his wrath?" Jarvis said.

Savitt often hires attorneys Hazeltime, Ellen Morris and John Pankauski, prolific practitioners in elder law. They or members of their firms practiced in front of Colin before he began recusing himself from their cases last year. From 2009 to 2014, Colin's recusals totaled 30. Since the beginning of July, he's taken himself off 133 cases — 115 involving his wife's lawyers.



Attorney Sheri Hazeltime, left, during a hearing regarding attorney fees. Elizabeth Savitt, seated right, is the wife of Judge Martin Colin and also a professional guardian. (Madellne Gray / The Palm Beach Post)

Hazeltime, Morris and Pankauski or their firms — as well as the guardians they represent — have had fees in non-Savitt cases repeatedly approved by Judge Colin, The Post found.

Clifford Hark of Boca Raton refers cases to Savitt. He has also earned fees approved by the judge in other cases. For example, Colin signed off on \$51,000 from the estate of retired Judge Stanley Hornstine in September 2013.

One of O'Grady's daughters, Kathleen Osterbuhr of Derby, Kan., wrote the court to say Hark promised the family to fight Savitt's petitions for lucrative fees in court, but never followed through.

Mayes said in another letter that "Hark has made mistakes and prolonged this case for his benefit" and that Savitt's "conflict of interest has caused more problems than it has solved."

Hark told The Post he has been practicing for 28 years in South Florida and does not "rely on Judge Colin for my livelihood."

"I represent and zealously advocate for my client's interest regardless of Ms. Savitt's involvement in the case," he wrote to The Post in an email.

He pointed out that in some guardianship cases Savitt has opposed his fees and that Colin has also not awarded him the entire amount of fees sought by his firm.

Hark did say that he was unaware of complaints about her by attorneys or family members in the

O'Grady case, which he referred to Savitt, and the guardianship of Lorraine Hilton, in which the family accuses the judge's wife of financial mismanagement. But, Hark reiterated that he recommends other guardians besides Savitt and that the decision, in the end, rests with the families.

Most of Savitt's attorneys also spoke to The Post but were limited in what they could say on the record.

O'Grady's son, Mayes, said Savitt capitalized on family turmoil, sending their conflicts to court to be resolved, where the litigation generated more fees.

"That was a fix," Mayes said in an interview. "I was still doing all the work, but she and her attorneys were billing and kept stirring it up with the family."

The family learned that Savitt was married to a judge when Judge Rosemarie Scher, then presiding over their case, said she'd been out to dinner with the couple and described the judge's wife as "part of the judicial community."

"Savitt never told us beforehand, which I thought she should have," said Mayes. "The lawyers never told us. I figured he was in another division, but he was in probate."

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Chief Circuit Judge Jeffrey Colbath, who presides over Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Martin Collin. (Lannis Waters / The Palm Beach Post)

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Collin has been allowed to remain in probate under Peter Blanc and Jeffrey Colbath, chief judges since Savitt became a registered guardian four years ago. While other judges rotate, Collin hasn't been moved out of the south county courthouse since at least 2008.

Blanc and Colbath, the current chief judge, presided separately over Savitt's divorce and made rulings favorable to her.

Blanc said he worked in Collin's law firm for about nine months as an "independent contractor." He

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told The Post that when Savitt became a guardian there was some discussion about a potential conflict, but he felt satisfied not moving him out of probate because Colin vowed not to preside over any of her cases. The Post has not found any of Savitt's cases where he did.

Chief Judge Colbath declined to answer questions for this story, but he has the power to move Colin to another division if he suspects impropriety.

Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Jorge Labarga in 2013 issued an administrative order to emphasize that the chief judges of circuit courts have the duty to take "corrective action as may be appropriate" if they feel a judge is acting inappropriately. Labarga declined to comment for this story.

Judges socialize, planned trip together

Judge Colin and his wife have socialized with one of the judges she appears in front of regularly, The Post has learned.

Colin and Circuit Judge David French eat lunch together nearly every day. Colin and French co-hosted a trivia night in May for the South Palm Beach Bar Association. The event was co-sponsored by Pankauski's firm. French did not return repeated attempts for comment.

French's first ex-wife Gayle Smith said her son, now grown, grew up in French's household and knew Colin as his father's running "mate" and that they often went on trips together.

French's second ex-wife, Christine Connelly, said she and Judge French were friends with Colin and Savitt. The two couples had planned a cruise vacation about five years ago, but it fell through when Colin didn't have his passport.

"We hung out, played tennis," she said.

French apparently doesn't always disclose this information to lawyers opposing Savitt in his courtroom on issues such as fees or her activities as a guardian.

Thomas Dougherty said he would have liked to have known that the judges socialized when he opposed Savitt in front of French.

Colin heads up elder-care pilot program

Any conflicts aside, Chief Judge Colbath has faith in Colin.

In September, Colbath announced an **Eldercare Coordination Pilot Program** headed by Colin to resolve family disputes in guardianship cases outside court will become permanent. The program is meant to decrease costs for families by bypassing attorneys and sending them to mediation.

Colin is excited.

"This pilot program is designed to put in place a conflict dispute mechanism that will allow guardians and family members to deal with nonlegal matters in a conference room setting and not in a courtroom ...with less cost and tension," he said.

Palm Beach County joined seven other circuits in Florida as well as Indiana, Minnesota, Idaho and Ohio in testing the program.

Are recusals enough to end conflict?

In the courtroom, Colin is trying to shed any conflict, but a divorce case illustrates how treacherous it can become.



Attorney John Pankauski makes arguments before Judge David French at the South County Courthouse Thursday, May 21, 2015, during a hearing surrounding the guardianship of James Vassallo's father. (Damon Higgins/The Palm Beach Post)

Amber Larkin accused her ex-husband, Andrew, of hiring trust attorney Pankauski because Andrew knew Colin would have to recuse himself. Judge Colin had indicated he would rule in her favor on a life insurance issue and even throw her husband in jail, according to court transcripts.

In addition to the recusal allegation, Pankauski was forced to defend himself on accusations that he was part of a strategy to get Colin recused.

The judge at a Sept. 29 hearing in the case explained why after four years he now recuses himself from cases involving his wife's lawyers.

Colin said that requiring attorneys to disclose that they work for Savitt used to be "a 100 percent acceptable procedure" and that there had never been a complaint.

But Colin said automatic recusals assure there is a court record, so there is no question about whether opposing lawyers know of the potential conflict.

"We have adopted long-standing approved methods to properly deal with such potential conflicts," he told The Post.

Colin's previous policy may have been flawed. A 2005 opinion by the Supreme Court's Judicial Ethics Advisory Committee said judges are the ones who are supposed to disclose.

This is not the first time Colin has been called out for conflict of interest. **Complaints surfaced in 2009** about him favoring attorneys who represented Savitt in her divorce after he became a judge. Colin says he wasn't punished. But the JQC can choose to reprimand a judge in private.

Colin was removed from the family division briefly and put into probate. Within two years, his wife was working as a professional guardian.

Despite his financial difficulties, Colin oversees divorce and probate cases in which he makes crucial rulings on money.

"By staying in the probate division, he put himself in a position to influence what work his wife gets," said Jarvis, who teaches a class on professional responsibility. "In fact, having this many recusals shows that something is amiss. It is all just rationalization – he should have avoided putting himself in a position where he has had to recuse himself so often."

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POST INVESTIGATION GUARDIANSHIPS

Chief judge investigating Post's findings on Colin, Savitt

Updated: 7:06 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2016

Posted: 6:52 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20, 2016



By John Pacenti - Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

The chief judge for Palm Beach County said Wednesday that he is investigating what needs to be done to address concerns brought forth by The Palm Beach Post's stories on Circuit Judge Martin Colin's role in adult guardianship.

Circuit Judge Jeffrey Colbath said in an email to The Post that he is in fact-finding mode and "is preparing to make appropriate changes to address concerns."



,Elizabeth Savitt appears at a hearing with Attorney Sheri Hazeltine to discuss attorney fees for Albert Bach on Thursday, August 20, ... [Read More](#)

Colin oversees family and probate matters in Delray Beach, including guardianships of adults no longer able to care for themselves. Colin's wife, Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt, is a former tennis pro turned professional guardian who operates in the same division and appears in front of Colin's colleagues.

But Colbath and the chief judge before him, Peter Blanc, took no action to eliminate potential conflicts caused by the close relationships in the south county courthouse.

Colbath has the power to transfer Colin out of the Probate & Guardianship Division, where he has been since about 2009. He also has the power to transfer Circuit Judge David French, who has been a close friend of both Colin and Savitt and oversees many of her guardianships.



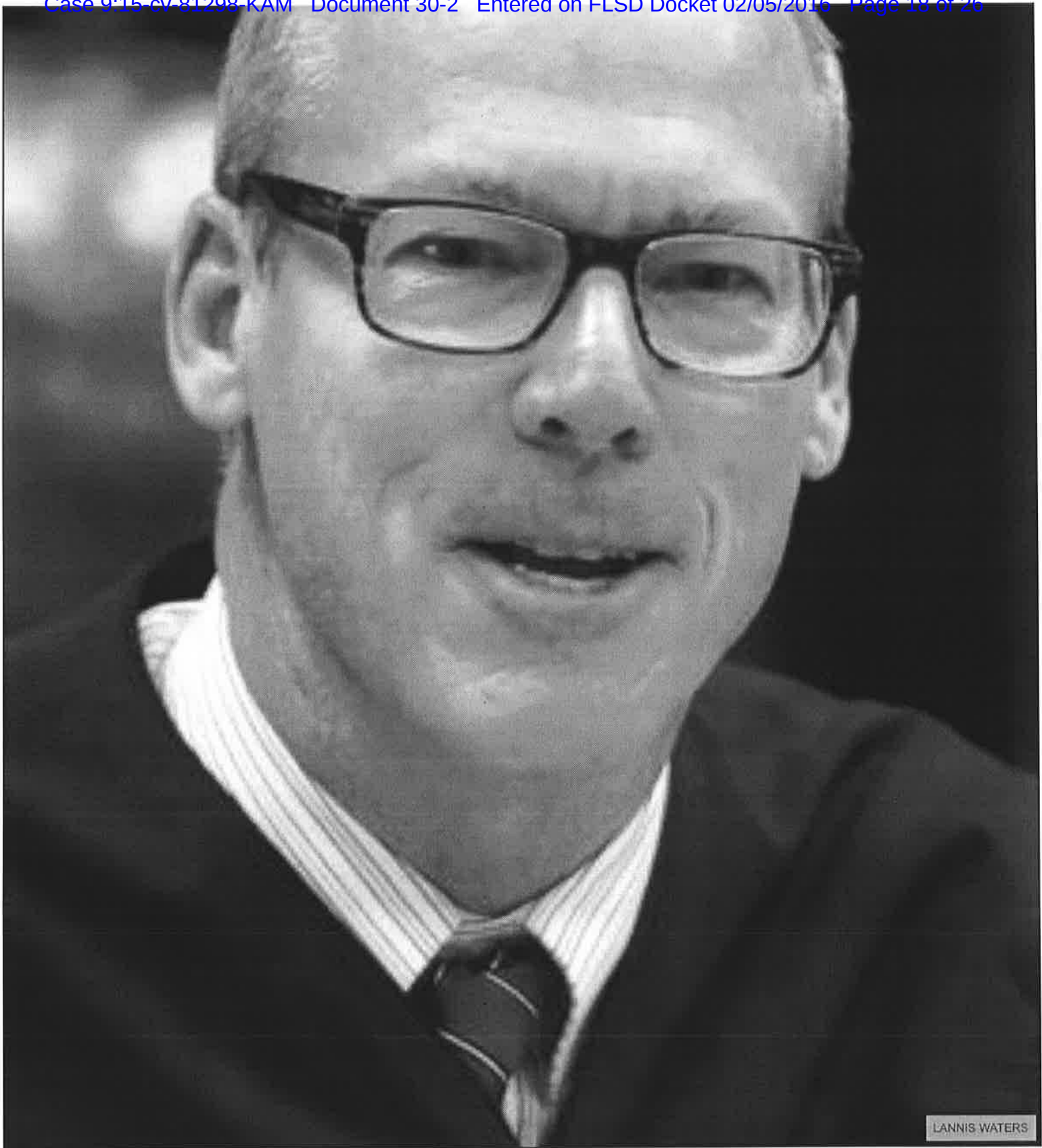
Judge Martin Colin presides over a hearing on Thursday, August 20, 2015, at the South County Courthouse in Delray Beach. Judge ... [Read More](#)

The Post found Colin's colleagues must approve Savitt's fees and fees for attorneys who represent her in guardianships of incapacitated senior citizens, many with sizable life savings. Families have accused Savitt, a guardian since 2011, of double-billing, taking fees without prior court approval and pursuing unnecessary litigation to drum up fees.

Several families separately told The Post that Savitt openly cites her husband's powerful position when confronted over her actions.

Savitt does not appear directly in front of her husband, but the attorneys who represent her litigated cases in front of him and relied on him at times to approve lucrative fees.





Palm Beach County Chief Circuit Judge Jeffrey Colbath

Two former Florida Supreme Court justices and a legal ethics expert told The Post the relationships pose a conflict of interest and appear improper.

After The Post started investigating last year, Colin recused himself from 115 cases in six months involving those

Case 9:15-cv-81298-KAM Document 30-2 Entered on FLSD Docket 02/05/2016 Page 19 of 26
attorneys who represent Savitt in guardianships, such as Ellen Morris, Sheri Hazeltine and John Pankauski, The Post reported Sunday. Previously, Colin said he required the attorneys to disclose their professional relationship with his wife, but The Post found that didn't happen in at least one case.

"We have adopted long-standing approved methods to properly deal with such potential conflicts," Colin told The Post.

Colbath has the power to transfer Colin or French out of the probate division. It's common for judges to be rotated every few years.

Savitt pointed out that she has never been sanctioned by any of her husband's colleagues and that complaints were from "disgruntled" family members. She also accused the paper of holding a grudge against her and her husband.

Families with seniors in Savitt's guardianships told The Post that their complaints about her financial management of seniors' life savings were ignored by Colin's colleagues, especially French.

Of particular issue is the tens of thousands of dollars Savitt has taken in fees prior to judicial approval in either guardianships or probate cases after the senior has died. Overwhelmingly, attorneys in the elder law field told The Post that state guardianship law does not allow guardians to take fees before a judge gives the OK.

This week it has been business as usual in Colin's courtroom in Delray Beach. Several attorneys told The Post they are not comfortable with the relationships in the probate division but fear repercussions if they speak out.

The families of some of Savitt's current and former wards did not hold back.

"They should be moved out of probate, and if possible, moved off the bench," said Jodi Rich, niece of Robert Paul Wein, who was in a Savitt guardianship before he died at 89 on Dec. 1.

"They are not abiding by ethical standards," she said.

Thomas Mayes, whose mother, Helen O'Grady, was in a Savitt guardianship, said there needs not only to be further guardianship reform by state lawmakers but a criminal investigation into Savitt. He doubted, though, anything would be done.

"They will just sweep the dirt under the rug or in a corner," he said.

Skender Hoti, a Lake Worth restaurant owner, watched Savitt in February 2012 try to assist a family guardian in seizing nearly every possession in a house he owned before she was stopped by sheriff's deputies.

"All their cases should be reviewed," he said of Colin and French. "No judge should be able not to rotate and stay in the probate arena."

What the Post found

Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Martin Colin is compromised by his wife's work as a professional guardian in the same probate and guardianship division where he has presided for years. His wife, Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt, took fees without court approval and in some instances double-billed. Read all the stories and see the documents at myPalmBeachPost.com/guardianships-colin-savitt.

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Report

Thank you

7:43 p.m. Jan. 20, 2016



mcfinn25

Report

Well, honestly, Judge Colbath is a person named in the article under not so ethical circumstances. Is he reliable to make a proper inquiry?

9:29 p.m. Jan. 20, 2016



CaptfFoyd

Report

This just seems to say that The Good Old Days are still here!!!
Palm Beach County is STILL the COUNTY of CORRUPTION!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Office Of Inspector General still has a massive Clean p Job to do!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I am guessing that they see it in the POTUS's Staff!
US Sec. Kerry's family is married to IRAN's Official!!
The top White House Advisor was born in IRAN & her family was under FBI investigation & has 24/7 Secret Security Detail and was not elected!!!!
Solar company that was given US Funds & then went bankrupt & the money was never repaid!! This same Solar company was given another even ore US Funds!!! They are also Obama's Donors!

Elected Official need to be in office 1 Term! The 2nd Term in JAIL!!!!

10:55 p.m. Jan. 20, 2016



Floridawalker

Report

They just should be removed altogether for the misery they have caused in the courtrooms

11:17 p.m. Jan. 20, 2016



citizenobserver

Report

Kudos to the Palm Beach Post for exposing this egregious mess! Wish they had a larger staff so they could take on irregularities at the municipal and county levels,also. There is plenty to investigate, but their corporate parent doesn't value the value of role the newspaper at the local level and continues to cut staff non stop. We need good reporting like this and other investigations they have done recently to keep our community healthy and corruption free. It forces people to stop looking the other way with a nod and a wink while corruption runs rampant.

1:07 a.m. Jan. 21, 2016



pepper38

Report

'Citizenobserver' said it so well, much better than I ever could. I wish someone would take the suggestions seriously.

10:08 a.m. Jan. 21, 2016

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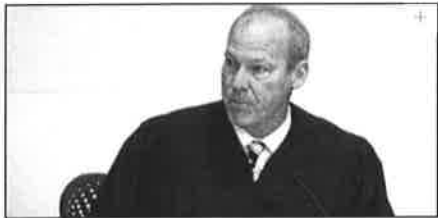
Updated: 11:12 a.m. Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2016 | Posted: 4:20 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2016

By Pat Beall and John Pacenti - Palm Beach Post Staff Writers

Palm Beach County Chief Judge Jeffrey Colbath announced Tuesday sweeping changes for guardianship of incapacitated seniors. The actions come amid revelations by The Palm Beach Post that the savings of these elderly wards flow into the household of Circuit Judge Martin Colin via his wife's work as a professional guardian in his division.



Also Tuesday, Colin announced that he won't be running for re-election.



Chief Circuit Judge Jeffrey Colbath reads the jury instructions to the jury in John Goodman's retrial Monday afternoon. October 27, 2014. Read More

The chief judge's reforms come in response to last month's Post series examining the role of Judge Colin and his wife — former tennis pro Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt — in guardianship cases. Among the changes is requiring all of Colin's current colleagues in south county to recuse themselves from her cases.

READ: Post investigative series Guardianships: A Broken Trust

Some of the changes by Colbath were unspecific, leaving more questions than they answered. The announcement does not mention Colin by name, though sources have told The Post that Colin is indeed going to be transferred.



Judge Madeline Gray presiding over a hearing on Thursday, August 20, 2015 at the South County Courthouse in Delray Beach. [Read More](#)

The changes are:

- Rotation of personnel to be effective Feb. 15.
- In-house training for probate judges and court staff.
- The establishment of a guardianship wheel to provide random assignment of professional guardians to cases.
- Standardization of bill practices for guardians and attorneys.
- Recusal of the current south county judges from Savitt's cases.

Colin, 66, said on Tuesday that he had planned not to run because he would not be able to complete his term before reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70.

- Stopping corrupt guardians: Advocates say start by capping fees

A Florida Supreme Court justice told The Post Savitt's role as a guardian created an appearance of impropriety for Colin, which could violate the state's judicial canons. While Savitt doesn't

appear in front of her husband, attorneys who represent her did regularly, relying on him at times to grant lucrative fees.

Colin recused himself of 115 cases between July and December involving Savitt's attorneys after The Post started investigating. Colin denied any conflict involving Savitt because he does not hear her cases.

Seniors in guardianships often lose all of their legal rights. If a family member can't serve as guardian, then the court can appoint a professional to manage the incapacitated senior's finances, their medical care and where they live.

In 2011, Colin's wife became a professional guardian, working in the same Probate & Guardianship Division where her husband presides. Since that time, Savitt has generated complaints from families on several fronts.

The Post's series revealed how Savitt took tens of thousands of dollars from the bank accounts of seniors without prior judicial approval, double-billed and funneled money to key relatives of the seniors in her care, including one son who had been accused of physical abuse and one daughter who had been accused of loaning herself \$140,000 from her father's bank accounts.

Savitt also assisted a family guardian in trying to seize property from a Lake Worth house where an incapacitated senior lived. Deputies stopped Savitt and made her return the possessions that did not belong to the senior.

Savitt told The Post she has done nothing wrong and pointed to the

fact she has never been sanctioned by one of her husband's colleagues. Despite concerns about her work, Colin's fellow judges continued to appoint her to oversee the lives of seniors found incapacitated by the court.

Many of her cases were in front of Circuit Judge David French, a friend of both Colin's and Savitt's who once planned a cruise vacation with the couple. It is unknown what will happen to French amid Colbath's changes.

Colbath's announcement comes on the day the Florida Senate moved forward a bill that would for the first time establish regulatory authority over professional guardians.

Colbath's changes do not bar Savitt from guardianship cases. They do keep her from appearing before her husband's colleagues and fellow judges in south county, where Colin has been in the family and probate division since 2009.

Colbath — who is an elected official — emailed his guardianship changes to The Post's attorneys through his own General Counsel Amy Borman, thus circumventing reporters.

"As you may know, the guardianship process does not have a traditional adversarial system that protects the interests of all parties. The chief judge has determined that improvements can be made here in Palm Beach County," Borman wrote.

When the Post reached out to Borman at home at 6 p.m. she refused to clarify Colbath's changes, such as which judges would be rotated and whether Colin and French would remain in the Probate & Guardianship Division. It was also unclear if Colbath's "standardization of bill practices" includes barring guardians like Savitt from taking money from seniors' bank accounts without prior judicial approval.

"This is my time. I'm not answering any questions," Borman said when contacted on her cellphone. When she was told The Post simply wanted to accurately portray the chief judge's intentions, Borman said, "Call me at work" and hung up.

If Colbath hoped these changes would mollify the families of Savitt's senior wards or advocates for guardianship change, he may be mistaken.

"Sadly, these are not improvements; they are instead a patronizing attempt to protect these judges by changing their address," said Dr. Sam Sugar, co-founder of Americans Against Abusive Probate Guardianship.

James Vassallo, a son of one of Savitt's senior wards, said he planned to move fast in order to protect his father's assets while Savitt still had control.

"So I got to get my lawyer to freeze my father's money so Savitt can't have it and then say, 'Catch me if you can,'" the Deerfield Beach resident said. "The money should be frozen so she can't touch it anymore. This just means I got to get a lawyer to go after her and spend more of my money."

Vassallo said he fears Savitt could move out large chunks of cash like she did in the Helen O'Grady case after O'Grady died. Savitt and her attorney took \$30,000 from O'Grady's savings to be held in trust. A judge made them return all but \$2,600 of it.

Robert Jarvis, ethics law professor at Nova Southeastern University, applauded Colbath for instituting "overdue changes," but added, "One

Jarvis said he hopes other judicial circuits are taking note.

"Hopefully, these sorts of changes will be happening throughout the state," he said. "The real question is, 'Are other courts paying attention?' Is the Florida Supreme Court paying attention?"

What The Post Found

The savings of incapacitated seniors flow into the household of Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Martin Colin courtesy of Colin's wife — professional guardian Elizabeth "Betsy" Savitt. Fees in most of her cases were approved by another judge who is a friend of her husband's. Colin approved the fees of her lawyers in other cases.

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