



**U.S. Department of Justice**

***United States Attorney  
Eastern District of Arkansas***

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**COUPLE PLEADS GUILTY IN CONSPIRACY TO DEFRAUD ELDERLY VICTIM**

**Little Rock** - U.S. Attorney Jane W. Duke announced that Deborah J. Ball, age 54, and Elmer Andy Masoner, age 57, entered separate guilty pleas today to the charge of conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Both guilty pleas were accepted by United States District Judge Brian Miller. As a result of their pleas, Ball and Masoner each face a statutory penalty of up to five years in prison and a potential fine of up to \$250,000. In addition, both defendants will be ordered to make restitution to the victim of their offense. While the restitution amount will not be definitely established until the defendants are sentenced, the United States Attorney's Office anticipates seeking a restitution order in excess of \$400,000. The remaining co-defendant, Julie Belisle, age 35, is currently scheduled for trial June 1, 2009.

Ball, Masoner, and Belisle were indicted November 5, 2008, in an indictment alleging that the defendants devised a scheme to defraud an elderly individual named Elizabeth Becker. The defendants carried out their scheme by establishing a relationship of trust with Ms. Becker in which she was completely dependent upon the defendants for her needs to be met and for her well-being; by taking advantage of Ms. Becker's weak physical and mental condition; by taking control of her financial assets; and then by using wire transmissions to divert Ms. Becker's assets for their own personal use.

Under the terms of their separate plea agreements with the United States, Ball and Masoner agreed to dismiss a civil action they filed against Ms. Becker in Saline County. That action sought the return of property seized from them when they were arrested by officers of the Hot Springs Village Police Department. Ball and Masoner further agreed to transfer title to a recreational vehicle they purchased with Becker's money so that the vehicle could be sold and the proceeds returned to Ms. Becker.

"Unfortunately, frauds like this are perpetrated upon the infirm and elderly far too often. Many times an elderly person's compromised physical and mental capacities, coupled with their access to retirement savings and other assets, makes him or her a prime target for con artists," stated Duke. She added, "This was a particularly egregious case because of the large amount of money taken and because the defendants went so far as to relocate the victim to another state in order to evade law enforcement authorities. I think the strength of the case has been demonstrated by the relatively quick pleas in this matter."

In April and July of 2007, Arizona Adult Protective Services (“APS”) received complaints that Ball was taking financial advantage of Becker. Representatives from APS attempted to interview Becker about the complaint. Becker, believing that Ball was taking care of her best interests, and being unaware of any unauthorized financial activity, denied the charges. On July 17, 2007, Charles Schwab, which held an investment account for Becker, filed a “Report of Suspected Dependent Adult/Elder Financial Abuse” with Arizona APS, and froze Becker’s account as a result of unusual activity. After Arizona Protective Services began their investigation, Ball and Masoner moved Becker from Arizona to Hot Springs Village, Saline County, Arkansas. While in Arkansas, the defendants continued to conduct unauthorized transactions with Becker’s Arizona financial institutions.

At some point during the conspiracy, Ball and Masoner returned to Arizona to put Becker’s home on the market. In order to do so, they hired a home health agency to care for Becker while they were gone. The home health provider caring for Ms. Becker realized what was taking place and reported it to the Hot Springs Village Police Department. Subsequently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was contacted to investigate the case. Ball and Masoner were arrested upon their return to Arkansas by the Hot Springs Village Police Department. Ball and Belisle have subsequently been removed as Power of Attorneys for Becker. There is also an on-going investigation by the Arizona Attorney General’s Office.

This investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Patricia S. Harris represents the United States in this case.

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