

## Disbarred Attorney Robert Stochel Sentenced for Wire Fraud



**Summary:** A former attorney was sentenced to federal prison for stealing the funds from an account he was responsible for taking care of.

A disbarred attorney from Indiana was sentenced to two years behind bars for wire fraud. Former Lake County attorney Robert Stochel was convicted of draining a receivership of over \$330,000 in May.

Stochel, 64, of Merrillville must pay back \$229,091.67 in restitution. This is the exact amount he allegedly stole from a Gary grocery store receivership. Stochel also took money from other sources, which he deposited into the account over the course of ten years.

Senior Judge James T. Moody of the District Court for the Northern District of Indiana in Hammond handed down the sentence on Stochel in the middle of where the government and his defense counsel wanted. The government urged for a four to five year sentence while his defense was asking for a one-year sentence. Moody recommended for Stochel to serve the two-year sentence in a federal prison near the Northern District.

Moody ordered for Stochel to report to the designated prison by January 19. He will also be under supervised release for one year after he serves his time in prison. Stochel was suspended by the Indiana Supreme Court in 2015 and later disbarred.

Stochel was appointed as the successor receiver of the family-owned Tip Top Supermarket Inc. in 2000, two years after the grocery store was dissolved. He was supposed to pay the defunct grocery store's creditors and return the remaining funds to the two brothers who owned the company. Instead he used the funds to pay for personal expenses.

The Disciplinary Commission accused Stochel of depleting the receivership account within four years. After that he allegedly misled parties repeatedly by telling the grocery store's owners, Maurice and Alan Schwarz, fake information for over ten years. He told them he was wrapping up the account, assuring them that there was money in the account. In 2012, he was ordered by a judge to turn over receivership records to an independent accountant, according to NWI Times.

In 2015, attorneys for the Schwarz family raised questions about why Stochel, an attorney since 1978, had not been formally charged. Moody had ordered restitution to be made to the family. Stochel was indicted a year later. A jury found him guilty after a three-day trial. The sentencing order allowed the court to seize some of Stochel's property in order to make the restitution order.

U.S. Attorney Thomas Kirsch said, "Attorneys are entrusted with a great deal of power and authority to act on behalf of and in the best interests of their clients. Those who do not, but instead engage in criminal conduct, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Assistant U.S. attorneys Diane Berkowitz, Maria Lerner, and Alexandra McTague prosecuted Stochel.

Why do you think attorneys who have practiced law without problems for years would make such a big mistake? Share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

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