

Lawyer Is Released After Serving Over 14 Years on Civil Contempt Charge

By The Associated Press

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PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A Pennsylvania lawyer was released from prison on Friday after serving what was believed to be the longest imprisonment on a civil contempt charge in United States history.

The lawyer, H. Beatty Chadwick, was released from a county prison in suburban Philadelphia more than 14 years after he was jailed for refusing to turn over millions of dollars in a bitter divorce battle. The case prompted dozens of appeals to county, state and federal courts, twice reaching the Supreme Court.

Mr. Chadwick, 73, was jailed in April 1995, accused of hiding \$2.5 million from his ex-wife during divorce proceedings. Mr. Chadwick maintained that he lost the money in bad investments.

After multiple efforts, Mr. Chadwick's request for freedom was granted by Judge Joseph Cronin of Delaware County, who determined that his continued incarceration had lost its coercive effect and would not result in his turning over the money.

In court documents ordering the release, Judge Cronin said he agreed with previous court rulings that Mr. Chadwick "had the ability to comply with the court order" but that "he had willfully refused to do so."

But Mr. Chadwick's continued imprisonment would be legal only if it were likely that he would ultimately comply with the order. The judge said that there was little chance of that, and that Mr. Chadwick should be released.

A onetime corporate lawyer, Mr. Chadwick has battled non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in prison.

After his release, Mr. Chadwick said judges have too much discretion in cases like his.

"If I had been convicted of murder in the third degree in Pennsylvania, I would have been out in half the time I was in jail," he said in a telephone interview.

He insisted that he was unable to pay the money and said the law should be written so people in his situation can have a jury decide if they are capable of complying with court orders.

Mr. Chadwick and the former Bobbie Crowther married in 1977 and lived in the Main Line suburbs of Philadelphia. She filed for divorce in 1992.

Bobbie Chadwick, who is now Bobbie Applegate, declined to comment on Friday.

Ms. Applegate's lawyer, Albert Momjian, said it was the longest incarceration on a civil contempt case in history. He said he understood the judge's decision but was disappointed.

"Here's a guy who thumbed his nose at a court order for 14 years," Mr. Momjian said. "There should be some kind of sanctions for doing that."

Mr. Chadwick said he would stay with his 41-year-old son, Bill, for now. He said he planned to find a job, though he was not sure what sort of work he would do.

"I have to spend a little time thinking about that and seeing how I can best use my skills and talents," he said, speaking from the office of his lawyer, Michael Malloy. He said he was not sure if he would return to practicing law; he is eligible to apply for his law license when a five-year suspension ends next year.