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Ex-millionaire arrested on fraud charges

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Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Karen Miller has in the past told former multimillionaire Brett Cormier that she didn't believe his claims of poverty. This week, prosecutors said they found evidence Miller's suspicions were correct.

Cormier was arrested Monday and charged with four counts of financial fraud after prosecutors said he lied in court documents in an effort to stick taxpayers with the bill for his defense on charges that he stole roughly \$1.9 million from former business partners.

When investigators subpoenaed Cormier's bank records, they discovered he deposited \$73,930 in his account during the same time he was claiming to be indigent and deserved a court-appointed attorney. Further, weeks after he swore on the same documents that he was out of work, he deposited two payroll checks - one for \$1,600 and another for \$1,500, according to an arrest affidavit released Wednesday.

The new charges propel Cormier into the annals of county court history. It is believed to be the first time someone has been charged with falsifying documents to get a taxpayer-funded attorney. And his notoriety isn't over yet.

On June 6 he is set to go to trial on charges that he duped four men, including former New York Mets infielders Howard Johnson and Tim Teufel, into investing tens of thousands of dollars in his tile business. Instead, prosecutors charge, he squandered the money, living large in a \$2 million Jupiter mansion, running up a \$25,000 tab at Club Diamonds strip club, taking a \$38,500 cruise and buying \$150,000 worth of jewelry.

Unless Miller reschedules the trial, Cormier will be forced to represent himself. Other suspects have fired attorneys and represented themselves on charges up to and including murder. But observers say they don't remember anyone being forced to represent themselves.

Cormier, who was arrested at his Port St. Lucie home, is being held in the St. Lucie County jail on \$50,500 bail, awaiting to be taken to the Palm Beach County Jail. He couldn't be reached for comment.

Cormier has claimed he has no money. He displayed a food stamp card from the state and an eviction notice from his landlord. He also pointed to his personal bankruptcy, finalized in February.

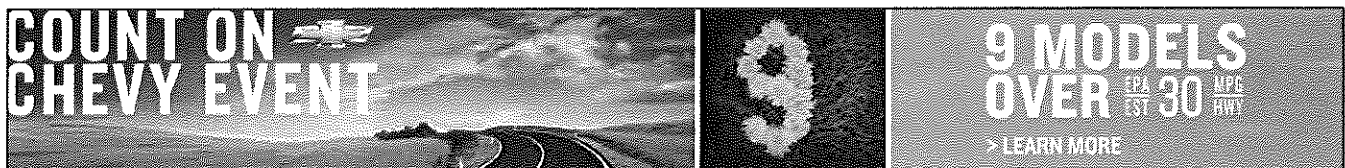
Attorney Guy Fronstin, who represented Cormier on the grand theft charges before Cormier stopped paying him, said he talked to his former client shortly before his arrest. "He stands by the statements he made. Everything he put in the documents is true and correct," he said.

Although not familiar with the basis for the new charges, Fronstin said he is convinced Cormier is broke. The arrest affidavit doesn't paint someone flush with cash. Investigators said that on March 22, when he reported having \$280 in the bank, the actual balance was \$726.

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