

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Elderly man arrested in Las Vegas after living a secret life for decades

Charlie Free escaped from a Florida prison 30 years ago

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (March 4, 2008) – After more than 30 years living a double life, Charlie Free, a.k.a. Jack Hazen, was arrested in Las Vegas, Nev., on Jan. 30. Free, a Vietnam veteran, was charged with armed robbery in 1976. Although no one was hurt during the crime, Free was sentenced to seven years in prison and escaped after serving 1 ½ years.

Free absconded during work duty in 1978 after a fellow inmate put a contract out on his life. He fled to Arizona, where he changed his name. There he met his future wife and her daughter before moving them all to Nevada and beginning a new, law-abiding life.

Now he is a 62-year-old man suffering from several expensive health issues, including Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and cancer. Free is being held at the Clark County Detention Center in Nevada while he awaits an extradition hearing on March 10. Free is also waiting to find out if Florida's governor, Charlie Crist, will sign a warrant for his arrest. If that happens, then Free will begin the long extradition process to Florida.

Many think Florida residents will balk at the expensive burden of taking on an unhealthy prisoner, but Free's doctor and family are more worried that the cross-country trip will further weaken him. His physician Dr. Rosenberg wrote a letter expressing concerns about Free's health issues during the two-week extradition.

"It has been brought to my attention that Mr. Charles Free will be transported to the state of Florida. As Mr. Free's physician, I am writing to reinforce the fact that he must have his medications during this time," writes Rosenberg. "Without these medications, Mr. Free's health would be compromised."

Due to his numerous health problems, Free's prescription expenses are more than \$36,000 each year. His care will become Florida taxpayers' responsibility if Free is extradited, and that figure doesn't include doctor visits or medical procedures.

"My client's medical condition is worsening and his expenses are immense," says Conrad Claus, criminal defense attorney representing Free. "If Free serves the remaining five years of his original sentence, then the Florida criminal justice system is looking at more than \$200,000 in medication fees alone."

Free's Florida attorney, Don Pumphrey, Jr., believes Florida's current budget problems should be considered before using Florida's money to transport, house and care for a terminally ill man.

"This is an elderly man who never physically harmed anyone in the original crime. Once Free is in Florida, he becomes Florida taxpayers' responsibility," says Pumphrey. "My hope is that Gov. Crist will deny the warrant or expedite the commutation of the original sentence."

Any of the governor's cabinet members can have the clemency process accelerated. Normally the process takes three years, but due to Free's health problems, his attorneys worry that will be too long.

Free's community seems to be pulling for him to stay in Las Vegas and character reference letters have been flooding his attorney's office.

"We've received more than 50 letters attesting to what a good man Charlie Free is," says Claus. "We hope that the judicial system is compassionate when dealing with a sick, elderly man who obviously turned his life around."

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Editor's note: Contact Megan Fuhrmeister to set up interviews with Free, his friends or family, and his legal representatives in Las Vegas, Nev. and Tallahassee, Fla.