

Contact:
Megan Fuhrmeister
850.322.2501 or Fuhrmeister@comcast.net

NEWS RELEASE

Free returns to Florida to face his past

The elderly man is now Florida taxpayers' responsibility

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (April 11, 2008) – Charles Free, a.k.a. Jack Hazen, has returned to Florida after spending the last two months in a Las Vegas, Nev., detention center for a crime committed 32 years ago. In 1976, one year into a seven-year sentence for stealing \$100 and food, Free fled because a fellow inmate threatened to kill him. He started a new, law-abiding life and is known as a hardworking family man. No one was aware of Free's troubled past, and his family was shocked when the FBI showed up at his door.

The 62-year-old man is now in a Lake Butler, Florida medical facility and has become Florida taxpayers' responsibility. Free suffers from several expensive health issues, including Alzheimer's, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and cancer. Not including doctor visits or medical procedures, his prescription bills alone will cost taxpayers \$250,000.

Free faces the remainder of his original seven-year sentence and could be given additional time relating to escape charges. Free's family is convinced that prison will further weaken him.

"He's a sick, elderly man and the jail time could kill him," says Christina Greer, Free's eldest daughter. "He's been living a law-abiding life for the last 30 years, and I hope Gov. Crist will consider commuting my dad's sentence."

Free's Florida attorney, Don Pumphrey, Jr., is working on just that and believes that there are other ways Free can pay his debt to society.

"We are starting the clemency and medical release process, and I hope the state will have mercy and exercise its discretion with Mr. Free," Pumphrey says. "He is not a threat to society, and I know the public would be better served through some community service or house arrest."

The clemency process normally takes three years, but due to Free's health problems and the state's burden of his medical costs, Pumphrey thinks that's too long. Any of the governor's cabinet members can have the clemency process accelerated.

"In this situation, there is no reason the clemency process should take three years," says Pumphrey. "This is an old man who turned his life around after making a mistake, and we shouldn't be wasting taxpayers' money locking him up."

Free has received a lot of public support and his lawyers have obtained more than 60 letters attesting to Free's character. His daughters have dedicated a Web site to freeing their father at www.freecharlesfree.com and have started a letter writing campaign to Gov. Crist.

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Editor's note: Contact Megan Fuhrmeister to set up interviews with Mr. Free and his Florida attorney, Don Pumphrey, Jr., as well as Free's family in Las Vegas, Nev.