

WINEVVS

Public Trustee SA staffer 'brazenly' stole cash, cars from deceased estates, court hears

By Candice Prosser

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A former employee of the South Australian public trustee office who stole cash and valuables from deceased estates has been labelled "selfish and dishonest", the District Court has heard.

Alana Marie Bartels, 37, pleaded guilty to seven counts of abuse of public office, each offence carrying a maximum penalty of seven years' imprisonment.

The court in Adelaide heard Bartels was employed as an estate officer when she "helped herself" to items of value from deceased estates she was tasked to oversee.

It heard she stole money, two cars and jewellery, which she either used or sold for cash.

Prosecutor Katie-Jane Orr told the court during sentencing submissions the offending was "calculated and brazen".

She said Bartels had falsified documents in an attempt to cover-up her offending and account for shortfalls in estates, and had stolen items that were unlikely to be missed from large estates where the beneficiaries resided interstate or overseas.

"She was effectively helping herself to the deceased estates to which she had conduct," Ms Orr told the court.

Sentimental items taken was 'brazen'

The court heard Bartels stole a car from a deceased estate and used it as her own, and took and used a disabled parking permit from a deceased estate because when she was running late for work she could not find a parking space.

Ms Orr said Bartels' actions showed "the brazen nature of her conduct, her disregard for property of other people and lack of insight into how inappropriate her conduct was".

The court also heard Bartels stole and pawned jewellery of sentimental value from deceased estates, and transferred stolen money to a friend and sold a car to fund her drug habit.

Public Trustee SA customer relations general manager Frances Anderson read a victim impact statement to the court on behalf of the organisation, saying Bartels' "selfish and dishonest actions" had "tainted the reputation" of the organisation.

"Your crimes, Alana, represent a most serious breach of trust on many levels and the lack of remorse you have shown is a further demonstration of your lack of integrity and poor character," Ms Anderson said.



PHOTO: Alana Bartels (L), pictured with lawyer Stephen Ey, is facing jail time. (ABC News: Candice Prosser)



PHOTO: Frances Anderson (R) said Bartels lacked integrity and was selfish. (ABC News: Candice Prosser)

"Many of the items you stole had more than monetary value for many beneficiaries — the sentimental value of the items you stole was greater."

Ms Anderson said many of Bartels' colleagues were left feeling shocked after the crimes were uncovered last year.

Bartels' lawyer Stephen Ey told the court his client was "completely guilt-ridden" and remorseful and intended to make restitution as best she could.

He said he would ultimately be asking the court to "give this woman a chance" and suspend her jail sentence, or allow her to serve it on home detention.

However, Ms Orr said an immediate jail term was warranted.

Judge Geraldine Davison granted Mr Ey's request to adjourn the pre-sentencing hearing to next month to allow Bartels time to attempt to make restitution and rehabilitate.

Bartels will return to court on August 24.

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