

# ABC NEWS

## Canberra man jailed for almost eight years over role in \$1m Public Trustee fraud

By Elizabeth Byrne

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**The final person charged over a \$1 million fraud from vulnerable clients of the ACT's Public Trustee has been jailed by the ACT Supreme Court for nearly eight years.**

Timothy Stewart McLeod, 36, was sentenced today, five years after the crime was discovered.

He and three others including fellow trust officer Donald Tawanda Savanhu, 38, and contractors Stephen Phillip Evans, 34, and Joshua Dean Leighton, 39, have all been sentenced over the scheme of false transactions and incomplete jobs.

In sentencing McLeod, Justice John Burns said "I suggest to you that you really now have hit rock bottom".

"These offences involved a significant degree of breach of trust.

"In large measure you were able to continue these offences for such a long time because of the vulnerability of the clients."

He said without McLeod's knowledge of the system, the crimes would not have been possible.

But Justice Burns stopped short of labelling McLeod the ring leader, saying only that his culpability was high.

The scam targeted people whose affairs are managed by the Public Trustee because they are unable to manage matters for themselves, often because of mental illness or age.

It included funnelling money through client's accounts and then withdrawing it, including an account belonging to a homeless man with paranoid schizophrenia.

On other occasions, McLeod would authorise payments for maintenance work that was never done, or take money labelled for holiday expenses for clients in nursing homes who were unable to take a holiday.

At other times sums were paid out with the reason being to purchase goods, including Macbook Air computers for clients with dementia.

The fraud involved hundreds of transactions and was only stopped when a co-worker filled in for McLeod while he was overseas on holiday.

The court has heard much of the money went on gambling.

McLeod has been sentenced to seven years and 10 months' jail, with a non-parole period of four years.

Stephen Phillip Evans was sentenced to three years' jail, and Joshua Leighton to four years' jail for their role in the crime.

Donald Tawanda Savanhu received a suspended sentence.

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**PHOTO:** Timothy Stewart McLeod has been sentenced to seven years and 10 months' jail. (ABC News)

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