

NATIONAL ACT

Public trustee thief jailed for at least four years

By [Alexandra Back](#)

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A former public servant who stole hundreds of thousands of dollars from some of Canberra's most vulnerable citizens was jailed on Monday for at least four years.

For more than 10 years, Timothy McLeod, 56, was a trusts officer at the ACT Public Trustee, the organisation responsible for managing the money of people not legally capable of managing it themselves.



Timothy McLeod, 56, enters court before he was jailed on Monday for stealing more than \$1 million from the ACT Public Trustee.

But McLeod abused his position to defraud the trustee and its clients, only stopping when he was caught in around 2014.

In a scam devised between himself and three others, McLeod and his co-offenders stole more than \$1.1 million over five years, with McLeod's share amounting up to \$700,000.

But it was McLeod's knowledge of the trustee's systems and his ability to manipulate them which made his part in the crimes so serious, Justice John Burns said.

The judge jailed McLeod on Monday for seven years and 10 months, setting a non-parole term of four years.

The 56-year-old is the last of the four to be sentenced in relation to the public trustee fraud. Of his co-offenders, one other trust officer and two contractors, McLeod received the most hefty penalty, the judge noting how McLeod had breached the trust of his position.

McLeod had earlier pleaded guilty to four counts of theft, though they were 'rolled-up' charges and represented more than 200 different transactions.

Each count represented a different way that McLeod defrauded the trustee and its clients, though all involved the use of false cheque requisitions.

In some instances, he requisitioned maintenance work from his friends, who were also approved trustee contractors, but the maintenance work was never done. He also requested cheques on behalf of his clients for "holidays" and electronic goods. In some instances, for one client who was homeless and suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, and another who was in a nursing home, he had cash transferred into bank accounts to which he had access.

The ACT Supreme Court heard McLeod had gambled and drank away most of the money he stole. When he lost his job as a public servant and his Canberra home, and now he and his wife live in a rural NSW town where they run the local hotel and make just enough to pay the bills.

His addiction to alcohol was so great, the court allowed McLeod to undergo a medically supervised detoxification in a Sydney hospital the week before he was jailed.

Justice Burns said the man's culpability for the crimes was higher than his co-offenders, and he said the crimes "could not have been committed without your involvement".

But the judge said McLeod had good prospects of rehabilitation if he addressed his gambling addiction and alcohol abuse, pointing to his supporting family, stable home, and employment.

"I would say to you that you've really now hit rock bottom," Justice Burns said. "Work your way up from this point ... I've no doubt you can be a useful member of the community and a good father and husband."

"Now it's up to you. Make the most of the time you have to spend in custody."

He will be eligible for release in 2022.



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