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Where's my \$1m payout?

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Article from: **Sunday Mail**

May 27, 2007 12:15am

SHOW me my money. That's the plea to the Public Trustee from road accident victim Tiffany Freeman.

The 35-year-old, of Crafers, was awarded more than \$1 million in compensation after she was left in a coma when the car in which she was a passenger crashed 18 years ago.

While undergoing nine months of rehabilitation, including learning to walk and talk again, Ms Freeman's court-awarded compensation was put in a Public Trustee administered fund.

But, although she said she was now fully capable of handling her own finances, the Public Trustee will not release her money.

"For years now they have treated me like I'm some sort of imbecile," said Ms Freeman, who works voluntarily with the Metropolitan Fire Service addressing schoolchildren about road safety.

"The Public Trustee's attitude to me is insulting – especially after all I have been through to rehabilitate myself."

Ms Freeman receives a yearly statement from the Public Trustee showing how much money she has in trust and what interest the money is earning, but she cannot find out exactly where the money is being invested.

"The interest return has not been good – during the recession in the early 1990s the fund actually lost 30 per cent," Ms Freeman said.

"At the end of the day it's my money, so why can't I have it to manage myself, let alone know how the Public Trustee is currently investing it?"

In 2005 Ms Freeman went to court to have her Protected Person order – under which the Public Trustee controls her money – rescinded.

"I had a psychologist's report saying I was mentally fit to look after my own financial affairs," she said.

"But an official from the Public Trustee – who I have never met – made an affidavit to the court saying I couldn't handle my own affairs and on that basis the order was upheld by the judge.

"But I won't give in and will be applying to the court again to have the order rescinded next year."

Independent MP Nick Xenophon – who has been in contact with Ms Freeman – will call for an inquiry into the Public Trustee's practices.

He said he was already investigating five separate complaints from people aggrieved at their treatment by the Public Trustee, including two cases reported in the *Sunday Mail* last month.

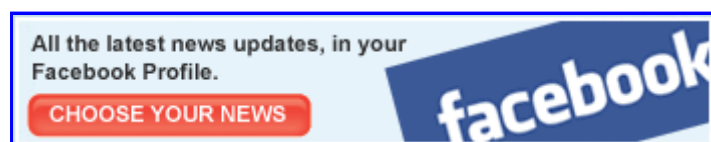
These involved an orphan whose inheritance was being whittled away by the Public Trustee in legal wrangling with the boy's grandparents and a man who says he was wrongly accused by the Public Trustee of ripping off his grandfather.

"As a result of all these complaints I will be calling for an inquiry by the Statutory Authority Review Committee to investigate Public Trustee practices, how they deal with the public and handle their complaints," Mr Xenophon said.

The Public Trustee, which is already under investigation by the State Attorney-General's department for workplace bullying, said it couldn't comment on individual cases due to privacy provisions.

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INSULTED: Tiffany Freeman says she is being treated like an imbecile over her crash payout money.



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