

# Paralegal Accused of Stealing From Fowler White Burnett Partner's Trust Fund

*A complaint filed in Miami-Dade Circuit Court accuses probate paralegal Pamela Altman of pilfering as much as \$1 million from a trust left by her father. The suit claims the money went to personal uses, including enriching her Massage Envy franchises in South Florida.*



**An Aventura paralegal has been accused of stealing to finance her Massage Envy franchises.**

An Aventura paralegal has been accused of purloining more than \$1 million dollars from a trust left behind by her father, a former partner at a South Florida law firm.

Pamela Altman is alleged to have continuously stolen from an account created by her father, former Fowler White Burnett partner Morton Brown, shortly before his death in March 2005. The fund was entrusted to Brown's surviving spouse, Sheila Brown, and had been intended to cover her medical and living expenses. The complaint filed in Miami-Dade Circuit Court contends that Altman, a part-time probate paralegal with Fromberg, Perlow & Kornik in Aventura, used her two decades of expertise and experience working with trusts and estates to steal her mother's money for her own ends.

The suit brings several charges against Altman and her husband Rick Altman, including accusations of tortious interference, conspiracy, exploitation of a vulnerable adult and breach of trust.

"Pamela offered to assist her mother with paying her mother's monthly expenses, and to be her bookkeeper, in exchange for \$800 per month," the filing recounted. According to the complaint, it wasn't long after Pamela Altman and her mother opened a joint account at Morgan Stanley to deposit funds from the trust that money began to go missing.

The complaint asserted that "as time went by, Pamela's theft and misappropriation knew no bounds." The Altmans are said to have used their purportedly illicit gains to finance "approximately \$300,000 in payments for Pamela's credit card bills," as well as dog grooming, doctor's visits, prescriptions, homeowners' association dues, hair salon appointments and more.

The couple is also accused of lifting funds from the trust to underwrite its Massage Envy franchises in Cooper City and South Miami.

“In addition to paying personal expenses from the joint account, Pamela and Rick conspired to cause the trust account to pay Massage Envy’s SBA loan, its business liability insurance, and its other business expenses,” the complaint said. “These loans were of no benefit to Sheila.”



**Christopher B. Spuches.** Courtesy photo

Christopher Spuches, the Miami attorney representing Sheila Brown and son Jeffrey Brown in their suit against the Altmans, told the Daily Business Review he and his clients believe the defendants also stole from personal accounts to support their endeavors.

“We believe Ms. Altman may have secured a loan from Massage Envy where she used her mother’s money as collateral without her knowledge,” the Agentis Law partner said. “We are not going to stop until we recover every penny that was taken from Ms. Brown, who as an elderly person should not have to spend these years of her life trying to recover money that may have been taken from her by a family member.”

In addition to the Altmans, the suit also named Fowler White attorney Stuart Altman, who is not related to the other defendants, but served as a co-trustee of the account. It also charged Massage Envy with unjust enrichment, along with accusing Morgan Stanley of

negligence. "They did not do a good job in vetting [Altman's transactions] and making sure that Sheila Brown approved them," Spuches claimed.

Altman described the allegations against him as being "without merit." Fromberg Perlow estate attorney Jeffrey Perlow declined to comment on the allegations against his longtime paralegal without reviewing the filed complaint.

Cooper City-based defense attorney Frank Smith said the charges against the Altmans are "untruthful."

"Our position is that the allegations are without veracity and the case is frivolous and potentially sanctionable," Smith said. He has filed a motion to dismiss with the court.



**Attorney Frank Smith. Courtesy photo**

Massage Envy did not reply to requests for comment by deadline.

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