

# Feds: Funeral home steals from seniors

Mar 23, 2007 3:00 AM by [Luke Broadwater](#), The Examiner

## BALTIMORE

A federal grand jury on Thursday indicted Paul Stella, 43, of Forest Hill and Paul Stella Funeral Home, for bank, mail and wire fraud in a scheme to steal more than \$525,000 in prepaid funeral expense accounts to fund Stella's gambling and other personal expenses, federal prosecutors said.

"The indictment alleges that Mr. Stella and Stella Funeral Home defrauded senior citizens by convincing them to buy prepaid funeral expense contracts and then stealing their money," said Maryland U.S. Attorney Rod Rosenstein. "We must protect people who are cheated in the process of planning for their own funerals."

Stella owned and operated his funeral home business, located at 7527 Harford Road in Baltimore, and allowed customers, many of whom are senior citizens, to pay funeral costs in advance, according to the nine-count indictment and court documents.

Each of these prepaid accounts garnered Stella \$500 to \$7,500, and Stella agreed to deposit the prepaid funeral expenses in accounts at a bank and act as a trustee to preserve the money for the customers' funerals, the indictment alleges.

But between June 2004 and December 2006, Stella forged documents and took money from these accounts to use for personal expenses, such as gambling, rather than holding the money for customers' funerals, prosecutors say.

The indictment seeks forfeiture of \$525,000 obtained from more than 100 of Stella's customers.

Stella faces a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison on the bank, mail and wire fraud charges. His company faces a maximum fine of \$1 million.

The federal investigation of Stella and his funeral home is still ongoing, Rosenstein said.

Prosecutors urge anyone who believes he or she may have been a victim of fraud concerning their prepaid funeral account to contact the FBI at 410-265-8080 .