

Michael Lippman, lawyer for Bronx Public Administrator, stole \$300,000, prosecutors charge

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His job was to help the living. Instead, a ruthless Bronx lawyer plundered \$300,000 from the estates of the dead, prosecutors charge.

Lawyer **Michael Lippman**, counsel to the Bronx public administrator from 1983 through last year, surrendered yesterday to face charges of billing for work he never performed on five estates.

Lippman, whose shenanigans were first exposed by the Daily News last year, was arraigned in Bronx Supreme Court on charges that could put him in jail for up to 15 years.

Public administrators are supposed to find heirs when someone dies without a will, and then fairly distribute an estate's assets as quickly as possible.

The survivors are often vulnerable families unfamiliar with the intricacies of probate law.

The city Department of Investigation charged **Lippman** repeatedly took advance fees from the estates without court approval. In each case, the bill was either inflated or for work that was never done.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said **Lippman** used his position "to extract excessive and unearned fees from the estates of deceased Bronx residents."

He pleaded not guilty and was released without bail. His lawyer, Murray Richman, said the statute of limitations had expired on the charges of grand larceny, scheming to defraud and falsifying business records.

Lippman pocketed more than \$1.5 million in upfront fees between 2005 and April 2008, before he was dogged with questions about the practice.

Records show that during that time, **Lippman** was drowning in debt - facing foreclosure on a \$400,000 mortgage, \$1 million in gambling losses and \$600,000 in unpaid taxes.

Richman said the Bronx district attorney's office was meddling in a lawyer's ability to run his business.

"It puts a chilling effect on all attorneys charging fees because the district attorney has the opportunity to look over what fees can be charged," he said.

Lippman is expected back in court in October.