

Muller, Brittany ([Brittany Muller](#)), Tampa man facing permanent paralysis says his settlement money disappeared, EFLA (Apr. 18, 2025), <https://www.wfla.com/8-on-your-side/tampa-man-facing-permanent-paralysis-says-his-settlement-money-disappeared/>.

TAMPA, Fla. (WFLA) — A Tampa man said he has lost hope, and the only thing he and his family are still holding on to is the chance that justice may still be served.

Sean Burke, 60, said he lost his financial security and his hopes not just for himself, but that he wouldn't be a burden on his loved ones. That money is gone, and he wants those responsible to be held accountable.

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Burke was once filled with life living in Clearwater Beach and spending time on the water on his boat with his dog. "I was in the hospital for two years," Burke said. An incident at a hospital seven years ago left Sean a quadriplegic. Burke reached a settlement with the hospital in November 2023.

He isn't allowed to talk about what happened or the money he and his family received. On the advice of his lawyer, Sean put the money in a trust for safekeeping at the Directed Benefits Foundation, a Pinellas County non-profit that told clients they specialized in disability trusts.

The foundation claimed to help people like Sean avoid the tax burden of a big settlement and still receive much-needed government benefits.

Sean thought the foundation would keep his money safe, but when he received no statements or records from the non-profit, he started to worry.

Finally, in February 2024, Foundation Director Karen Fisher visited Burke at the Tampa care facility he calls home. "The lady that worked there would come here, and I told her she was stealing," Burke said. A few months later, the Florida Attorney General's Office confirmed what Burke said he knew all along.

"There are initial civil actions that have to be filed we have to make sure that we are preserving resources for the most vulnerable," said Sen. Ashley Moody, former Florida Attorney General.

In May 2024, the AG's office sued the Directed Benefits Foundation, its founder [Leo Govoni](#), Karen Fisher, and Govoni's business, Boston Finance Group. The suit alleges they stole more than \$2 million from the Foundation client's trust accounts.

Burke is named as a victim in this lawsuit. The suit claims Fisher "provided a false general ledger showing inflated, incorrect amounts" for his trust.

Burke wants answers from Govoni, the man in charge. "Where's Leo?" Sean questioned.

In January, [Leo Govoni was found liable for \\$120 million](#) in missing money taken from disabled people through his now bankrupt non-profit, the Center for Special Needs Trust Administration.

The center is another Govoni-run charity that specialized in safeguarding trust money for disabled people.

Attorneys representing the alleged victims in that case told the judge that mail, checks and trust documents from the Foundation were discovered inside Govoni's other businesses based in Clearwater, too.

The attorneys claim that Govoni directed staff to move money from the foundation to his own business, Boston Finance Group.

Burked guessed that \$700,000 is missing from the account.

Earlier this month, [8 On Your Side Investigative Reporter Brittany Muller asked Govoni questions](#) outside the courthouse, but he remained quiet.

"Where's the money? Will any of the victims ever recover any of the money?" Brittany asked Govoni.

But for Burke and his family, this is about more than just the money. "It's been a family hardship because he's already been damaged, and this has just been overwhelming for our family," said Erin Sumrall, Burke's sister.

Now he waits and watches as this case unfolds. "I would tell him [Govoni] to come and talk to me," Burke said.

There are several civil court proceedings playing out in [Pinellas County Court regarding his Big Storm Brewing business](#).

In federal court on Friday, Judge Roberta Colton gave Govoni a week to produce financial records and personal financial statements. If he doesn't, the judge said he could face daily fines or even be jailed on contempt charges, something that could be decided at a hearing on Friday, April 25 at 10 a.m.

Govoni was asking to be allowed back into his businesses at 12707 49th St. N., Clearwater. In March, Colton ordered Govoni to steer clear of his many businesses as investigators [search for records and the missing money](#).

Attorneys told the judge on Friday that he was granted permission to enter the premises on Thursday, but instead of locating the requested documents, he allegedly only gathered items of sentimental value.

Leo Govoni is representing himself in the proceedings playing out federal bankruptcy court. Despite not facing any criminal charges, Govoni has hired a criminal defense attorney, Paul Sisco.

Sisco has declined to comment to 8 On Your Side.