

## Class-action lawsuit proposed against Ron Wilson

By Mike Ellis

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EASLEY — Attorney Candy Kern-Fuller said she lost money that she invested with Ron Wilson and she is trying to start a class-action lawsuit against the former county council member.

Wilson is the subject of two separate but related criminal investigations into an alleged multi-million dollar Ponzi scheme, according to a spokesman for the South Carolina Attorney General's Office.

The spokesman, Mark Plowden, confirmed Friday that federal officials and state authorities are working "hand-in-hand" on investigating Wilson, alongside the South Carolina Securities Division.

Wilson is accused of using his Atlantic Bullion & Coin business in Easley to take money from clients who thought they were buying silver while little, if any, silver was ever purchased for them, according to a complaint from the attorney general's office.

He was given about \$71 million by investors between 2009 and 2012, most for silver or silver investments, according to the complaint, which does not indicate how much of that is alleged to be fraudulent.

Wilson has not been arrested or charged with a crime, officials said Friday evening.

He has not been available for comment. The state documents do not mention any attorney for Wilson and it is not clear if he has retained a lawyer since the complaint was made public Monday.

Kern-Fuller said she invested about \$10,000 with Wilson and had removed the principal investment but lost out on the purported earnings.

"I am disappointed," she said. "But others had it much worse."

She said friends who also invested with Wilson have been flooding her law office, Upstate Law Group, with questions. By Friday afternoon at least 80 investors were interested in pursuing a civil lawsuit against Wilson, Kern-Fuller said.

The investors will be meeting with her on Monday evening. Kern-Fuller said that because she invested with Wilson, she was requesting an ethics ruling on whether she could represent plaintiffs but in either case she would want an attorney specializing in class-action lawsuits to be on board.

The 80-some investors had put as little as \$4,000 up to as much as \$1.2 million in Wilson's trust, Kern-Fuller said.

Kern-Fuller said one woman had met Wilson last week and handed him more than \$65,000 in cash. Several of Wilson's clients have told the Independent Mail that he had meetings in Easley as recently as last week where he gave sales pitches about the investments.

State Rep. Joshua Putnam, whose district includes Wilson's business, said in a statement Friday that he "felt a deep sense of responsibility for what occurred, disappointment in the ethics of Ron Wilson and was compelled to see that South Carolinians never be taken advantage of again."

Putnam said he is preparing legislation that would address problems with cease and desist letters, such as the one Wilson signed, and fraudulent business practices. He said the legislation would be released Thursday, along with further details.

Putnam's statement does not mention that Ron Wilson was a major donor to the state representative's 2011 campaign, giving \$1,000 on June 29. Putnam did not respond to a Friday evening request to comment on Wilson's donation.

Wilson met with state securities investigators in February. The complaint alleges that he lied or misled investigators during that meeting about both the nature of his business and the amount of silver he had stored.

Wilson said in the February meeting that he had between \$16.9 million and \$20 million worth of silver stored in a Delaware depository. The depository had no record of Wilson, his business or the silver, the complaint alleges.

The complaint was filed Monday in Richland County. U.S. Secret Service agents raided Wilson's Easley business Thursday night and in the parking lot agent Thomas Griffin said they intended to remove computers, files and silver.

Griffin, the resident agent in charge of the Secret Service's Greenville office, declined to confirm Friday what had been removed. He said search warrants for Atlantic Bullion & Coin and the adjacent, yet-to-open Live Oak Farms business had been sealed. The two businesses are in an Easley strip mall, Wilson kept his Land Rover in a garage attached to the Live Oaks Farms, which also is the name of a business run by his daughter, according to websites for company.

The complaint accuses Wilson of violating five sections of the State Securities Act. It suggests a penalty of \$10,000 for Wilson and \$10,000 for his business for each individual violation.

Wilson agreed in a 1996 document that he would cease and desist selling silver securities. Plowden said that Wilson restructured his business with the guise that he was selling commodities, which is why investigators did not discover anything amiss for so many years.

A commodity business, with little oversight, would generally give customers the physical silver while a securities business would generally sell a certificate or other form of silver investment.

Wilson sold securities without the required licenses or oversight, the recent complaint alleges.

Wilson served as an Anderson County Council member from 2008 to 2010. He was the national commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans from 2002 to 2004. He unsuccessfully ran for the state Senate in 2004 and served as a South Carolina Board of Education member from 2005 to 2007.



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