Attorneys advocate for elderly couple's assets

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No decision in dispute over assets
Cramers' millions contested
BY PETER HULL, The Island Packet
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BEAUFORT — A doctor testified Monday in a hearing on whether to freeze millions of dollars of disputed assets that an elderly Hilton Head Island woman was not capable of handling complex financial transactions on her own.

Dr. L. Randolph Waid, a neuropsychologist experienced in testing for mental deficiencies, told Beaufort County Master-in-Equity Curtis Coltrane that tests he conducted last year showed that while educated and highly intelligent, then 93-year-old Eleanor Breedlove had trouble concentrating and has poor memory.

"Her memory was very, very, very poor," Waid testified. "She had difficulty learning and retaining information."

Waid was the last to testify in a hearing that began Friday as part of a civil lawsuit brought against Lisa and Nathan Cramer by Eleanor and Bernard Breedlove, a wealthy Hilton Head Island couple who are now both 94 years old.

Coltrane told attorneys at the end of the hearing that he would not decide until at least the end of today on whether to grant the request to freeze the disputed assets.

Lisa Cramer, 35, also faces a criminal charge of financially exploiting a vulnerable adult, and her 33-year-old husband is charged with conspiracy. A lieutenant with the Bluffton Police Department, Benito Reyes, also was charged with conspiracy and remains suspended without pay.

On Friday, about a half-dozen witnesses, including bank employees, financial advisers and a doctor, testified on whether the Breedloves could make their own decisions or were "unduly influenced" into giving millions of dollars in assets to the Cramers.

Attorneys for the Breedloves, concerned that nearly $6 million deposited in bank accounts and invested in real estate by the Cramers is slowly disappearing, asked the court to freeze the assets until the lawsuit was resolved.

"We're not asking the court to take it away from the Cramers," Richard S. Rosen, the

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Breedloves' Charleston-based attorney. "We want the court to keep it where it is until the case is over."

The lawsuit accuses Lisa Cramer, a part-time Bluffton police officer on indefinite suspension, and her husband of taking millions of dollars in assets from the couple.

The defense does not dispute that money moved from the Breedloves' accounts to the Cramers', but it claims the millions in property, money and cars the Cramers received were gifts intentionally given to them by Eleanor Breedlove.

In a June 6 order, the Beaufort County Probate Court found the Breedloves incapable of taking care of themselves and appointed a permanent guardian to look after their physical and financial well-being. The Probate Court did decide that Eleanor Breedlove could make limited financial decisions with the assistance of the guardian.

The Cramers' attorney, Lionel Lofton of Charleston, argued that freezing the Cramer's assets would serve only to unduly influence a later jury.

"The only person who's going to be harmed is Mrs. Cramer," Lofton told the court.

The case has seen a series of legal maneuvers.

In March, Coltrane ruled the case should go forward after defense attorneys argued their clients would be deprived of their rights to a fair trial if the civil case went ahead of the criminal case. Coltrane ruled it would be unfair to the Breedloves to postpone the lawsuit, given their advanced age.

As soon as the judge issued the order, the defense filed a notice of intent to appeal, a move that halted any further action on the Breedloves' request for a court order prohibiting the defendants from transferring any of the disputed assets.

In April, the Court of Appeals ruled that a hearing over the disputed assets could go forward. The appellate court has yet to rule on the defense request that the civil lawsuit should wait until the conclusion of pending criminal charges.

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