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## Attorney's twin brother thanks CPD for capturing suspected liar and thief; Crook remains in Levy County Jail



**Attorney Robert McNelis**

*Photo Provided*

**By Jeff M. Hardison**

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**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** – A Rhode Island attorney contacted *HardisonInk.com* to note his appreciation for the Chiefland Police Department recently capturing a suspected embezzler and thief, who allegedly victimized his twin brother -- before that suspected felon moved to Florida and allegedly wreaked havoc on a Ford dealership in Chiefland.

Attorney Robert McNelis and Attorney James Ryan McNelis are twin brothers.

Attorney J. Ryan McNelis and attorney Terry McEnany are representing Robert

McNelis in a case that started after Marcus Anthony Crook met attorney Robert McNelis in early 2017 at McNelis's law office in Johnston, R.I.

Crook is a man currently suspected of stealing about \$40,000 from Chiefland Ford, as well as failing to report himself as a convicted felon when he came to Florida from Rhode Island, and he is suspected of using a false Social Security number as well as a false name, according to records.

**Marcus Anthony Crook, 31, of Fort McCoy was going by the name of "Marcus Carpenter"** while he was working for Plattner Automotive Group of Sarasota, the owners of Chiefland Ford, according to records.

Before his six counts of embezzlement, six counts of grand theft and other crimes in Florida, Crook was a suspected criminal in Rhode Island, as well as being a man convicted in Rhode Island of felony domestic battery, according to records.

The story of attorney Robert McNelis, though, shows his suffering is collateral damage from Crook's suspected lying and stealing. McNelis is initially accused of committing crimes connected with his checks being forged and cashed by Crook, although the State of Rhode Island has not moved forward with its judicial process much on those various initial charges.

Attorney Robert McNelis was arrested in January of this year, while his brother attorney J. Ryan McNelis was standing next to him in court. The two attorneys were in court for different reasons with Robert serving as a criminal attorney and his brother working with civil litigation.

Rhode Island is different than Florida in the manner in which it handles criminal

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cases.

Quickly jumping to the proverbial bottom line in regard to attorney Robert McNelis, he soon will be fully exonerated, with charges against him fully expunged; however, the nine-month multi-state path leading to this end result reflects that the wheels of justice sometimes move slowly.

Attorney J. Ryan McNelis knew his brother was innocent, not only from the presumption of innocence that goes with any defendant, but because he is his twin brother – and he knows attorney Robert McNelis would not have a convicted felon forge McNelis's own checks, which were made out to that very felon.

First, to get a quick view of procedures from Rhode Island jurisprudence, in Rhode Island, if a person is arrested on a felony count, then he or she gets "presented" before District Court to determine bail being set.

Attorney Robert McNelis was arrested on Jan. 31, and later that day he was brought to District Court as defendant McNelis. A judge released him on personal recognizance, and even granted the man permission to leave the country the following day – on Feb. 1 to go to Europe – on his honeymoon with his wife.

Since that fateful day about nine months ago, the police and Attorney General's Office have continued two separate "Pre-Arraignment Conferences," as their investigation had not been complete.

This case was incomplete, in all likelihood, because Crook had already fled from Rhode Island to Florida, hence denying the authorities any ability to use Crook's testimony to proceed in this matter against the attorney.

Attorney Robert McNelis has his next "Pre-Arraignment Conference" currently set for Dec 12, according to records, although that docket may change. He is scheduled to appear in court today (Thursday, Sept. 27) to ask for permission to travel to Kentucky, where his wife's family is located.

On Tuesday (Sept. 25), the defense attorneys and their defendant learned that the leading prosecutor in these cases against Robert McNelis, prosecuting attorney Paul Carnes, intends to dismiss this case and use attorney Robert McNelis as a witness in the prosecution of Crook.

"We regret that Marcus Crook was enabled to victimize the people of Levy County, Florida," Attorney Ryan McNelis said on behalf of his brother and others, "and we sympathize with his victims there, as Robert McNelis and others have been victimized by Mr. Crook here (in Rhode Island). Justice may work slowly, but the system ultimately works, and we are confident that Robert McNelis will soon be fully exonerated, with these charges fully expunged."

Before the Chiefland Police Department caught Crook recently (that story is on the [POLICE PAGE](#)), Crook allegedly had plied his trade as a liar and a thief, and roped in attorney Robert McNelis as one of his victims in Rhode Island.

It was early 2017, when Robert McNelis met Crook through his law office in Johnston, Rhode Island.

In mid-2017, Crook used his access to that office to rifle through desks and obtain a checkbook, and to write four checks to himself.

In late 2017, a criminal complaint was filed by a check-cashing company and Robert McNelis against Crook.

In December of 2017, Crook was arrested.

Crook told police that a "corrupt lawyer" made him sign checks that were written to

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him. As a result, Crook allegedly stole \$11,000 from attorney Robert McNelis.

Crook convinced Rhode Island law enforcement officers that it would only be if he was out on bail that they could catch the lawyer. Police released Crook.

In December of 2017, Crook wore “a wire,” as the police used him to “catch” this lawyer who is said to be in cahoots with Crook.

Nothing incriminating is said, but Crook offers investigators screen shots of text messages where Robert McNelis allegedly appears to discuss splitting “the loot.”

On Jan. 31, Police obtained an arrest warrant and served it at the Garrahy Judicial Complex in Providence, where Robert McNelis was representing two clients.

This is when Robert and J. Ryan McNelis were standing next to each other. As noted, this was a coincidence because they don’t practice together.

From Feb. 1 through Feb. 15, J. Ryan McNelis obtained cell phone records from his brother’s carrier showing a distinctly different number of text messages sent to or received by Crook on Robert’s cell phone.

Attorney Robert McNelis had voluntarily surrendered his cell phone to the Attorney General’s Office pending the investigation.

From Feb. 15 through Feb. 28, a few subsequent alleged victims of Crook signed sworn affidavits that Crook has spoofed cell phone records before, and he forged checks and embezzled funds.

All of those affidavits were given to authorities.

In March, Crook appears to have felt pressure from Pawtucket police investigating a motorcycle and cash deposit allegedly stolen by Crook, so Crook flees to Massachusetts, where he obtains a job at another dealership.

In April, Crook flees to Florida, and changes name to “Carpenter” and uses a Social Security number of a dead Crook relative to obtain a new job in Chiefland at the Ford dealership.

Meanwhile in May and August, attorney Robert McNelis’s “Pre-Arrestment Conferences” are continued to Dec. 12, so authorities can continue investigating.

In late August, a manager of Chiefland Ford suspects foul play by the company’s new sales manager, and installs computer tracking software, and monitors Crook’s activities. He turns the log over to the Chiefland Police Department.

On Sept. 4, Crook is arrested, and a bond of about \$500,000 is set.

On Sept. 7, news hits Rhode Island, and TV station WPRI runs an update on the story about the lawyer arrested in January.

On Sept. 19, 2018 at 6:48 p.m., *HardisonInk.com* published the story about Crook’s arrest.

On Sept. 25, Attorney Robert McNelis, his brother Ryan McNelis and their friend and co-counsel for Robert’s defense attorney Terry McEnany are informed by prosecuting attorney Carnes that charges against Robert McNelis will be dropped, and he will be treated as a victim and a witness in any trial of Crook.

Attorney J. Ryan McNelis and attorney Terry McEnany have a tremendous amount of investigative work completed in this case, including J. Ryan McNelis hiring detectives to track Crook.

The two defense attorneys in these cases against attorney Robert McNelis have three affidavits that attorney J. Ryan McNelis personally took. These were sworn before a notary (other than that attorney) and are from other Rhode Island alleged victims of Crook.

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Furthermore, the defense team has certified attorney Robert McNelis's text records from Sprint, which probably would compel the State of Rhode Island to ask "is Marcus Crook lying and these text messages are the result of Adobe Photoshop (or some other program)? Or is Sprint, a multinational corporation, lying and falsifying their business records to protect Robert McNelis?"

It appears that investigators failed to account for spoofing applications that allow criminals to manufacture fake text message logs. This may have caused them to arrest a member of the Rhode Island Bar Association without any prior criminal history. Attorney Robert McNelis has not been precluded from practicing law after this arrest; nevertheless, it obviously cast a shadow over the attorney – even though all suspects in America retain their presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

And of course, Crook has that same presumption of innocence for the Rhode Island and Florida felonies he is suspected of committing.

As of Sept. 27, Crook remains in the Levy County Jail in lieu of about a half million dollars' worth of bonds.

Crook is charged with six counts of six counts of embezzlement, six counts of grand theft and failure to register as a convicted felon as his list of Florida crimes so far. He was previously reported to have 33 arrest warrants from Rhode Island, when the CPD took him into custody.

Attorney J. Ryan McNelis said he is extremely grateful to Chiefland Police Chief Scott Anderson and the entire Chiefland Police Department for their work that led to the capture of the Rhode Island fugitive and Florida suspected felon – Crook.