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HEADLINE: HEARING SET TO CONSIDER SECRECY OF PLEA BARGAIN

BYLINE: Susan Spencer-Wendell The Palm Beach Post

BODY:

A Palm Beach Circuit Court judge will not immediately unseal a deal that wealthy Palm Beach money manager Jeffrey Epstein made with federal prosecutors to avoid charges.

Circuit Judge Jeff Colbath acknowledged, though, at a hearing last week that Epstein's deal was not sealed in accordance with state and local court rules.

"I don't see where any of the procedures were ever followed to begin with," Colbath said.

Colbath also set a full hearing on the matter for June 25.

Attorneys for young women now suing Epstein, together with The Palm Beach Post, are asking Colbath to unseal the deal that Epstein made with federal prosecutors.

"It's a secret agreement, a secret sweetheart agreement," said former Circuit Judge Bill Berger, who represents some of the women. "Everybody was in on this deal except the victims and the public. The public should be outraged it has gone as far as it has."

Brad Edwards, a second attorney representing the women, has seen the sealed deal after a federal judge allowed him and his clients to view it, but would not discuss its contents.

Edwards would say only that the women were "outraged" that it had been negotiated behind their backs.

A reporter asked Edwards whether he thought Epstein received special treatment by federal prosecutors.

"Are you kidding? It's transparent. Certainly, no one else gets treated like that," Edwards said.

Epstein, 56, a reported money manager of billionaires, is serving an 18-month sentence in the Palm Beach County Stockade after pleading guilty almost a year ago in state court to felony solicitation of prostitution and procuring teenagers for prostitution. Epstein is allowed out, though, each day from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., a Sheriff's Office spokesman said.

Displeased with the way the State Attorney's Office handled the case, Palm Beach police forwarded information to the FBI.

INFORMATIONAL BOX:

Young women have sued

HEARING SET TO CONSIDER SECRECY OF PLEA BARGAIN Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, Florida) June 15,
2009 Monday

Money manager Jeffrey Epstein made a deal and is serving an 18-month sentence in jail. Attorneys for young women suing Epstein are asking a judge to unseal the deal that Epstein made with federal prosecutors.

NOTES: < Informational box at end of text. {TOPIC} Prostitution solicitation case

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