

## Lawyer gets 2-year term in federal bank case

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### Document Text

Got prison, attorney says, since he would not 'snitch'

DAYTON, Ohio - Cincinnati attorney Clyde Bennett was sentenced to two years in federal prison Friday for making illegal financial transactions.

Bennett, one of the region's top criminal defense lawyers, said he received prison time instead of probation because he refused to cooperate with authorities investigating his case.

"That's why I'm going to prison," Bennett said after he was sentenced in U.S. District Court in Dayton. "I'm a lot of different things, but I am not a snitch."

Bennett pleaded guilty in September to making illegal bank deposits totaling \$124,000 from 2002 to 2003. The deposits violated federal law because they were structured to circumvent laws that require banks to report deposits of \$10,000 or more.

Judge Thomas Rose said the \$124,000 included at least some proceeds from "unlawful activity."

Federal prosecutors would not describe the unlawful activity and declined to say whether they had asked Bennett to provide information about others as part of their investigation.

Bennett, however, said his refusal to cooperate resulted in his prison sentence, which he will begin serving in about a month.

"They asked and I said no," Bennett said. "I'm not going to tell on anybody."

He would not say what kind of information investigators sought from him.

Lawyers on both sides of the case have refused to explain how Bennett's financial transactions became the focus of a federal investigation involving the IRS and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Dwight Keller said the case was "a spinoff" from other investigations and that no other arrests have been made in connection with Bennett's case.

He said attempts to evade bank reporting requirements are a concern because they sometimes mask other illegal conduct, such as drug transactions, organized crime or terrorism.

"For a licensed attorney to become involved in this type of activity is very serious," Keller said.

Bennett was not charged with any other crime and said after his sentencing that he did nothing else wrong. He said he accumulated the \$124,000 by collecting fees from clients from his legal practice.

He said the reference to "unlawful activity" involved legitimate payments from criminals he was representing.

"All income I generate comes from criminals," Bennett said. "I'm a criminal defense lawyer."

He was considered a good one for many years, working primarily in Hamilton County and Cincinnati's northern suburbs. He had worked for Dinsmore & Shohl, one of Cincinnati's largest and most prestigious firms, until he resigned in September.

Judge Rose said he had received letters of support from Bennett's friends and colleagues, who "attested to the fact that there is another Clyde Bennett who is law-abiding and has been a good person."

But Rose said the seriousness of the offense justified a two-year sentence, which Bennett will likely serve at the federal prison in Morgantown, W.Va.

Bennett apologized in court to his family and fellow lawyers and said he takes responsibility for his actions. Although he faces discipline by the Ohio Supreme Court and could permanently lose his license, Bennett said he hopes to practice law again.

"I'm still confident, I'm still ambitious," Bennett said. "My spirit is not broken."

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<b>Abstract</b> (Document Summary)
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