

# Former Aretha Franklin lawyer wants piece of singer's estate

---

 [detroitnews.com/story/news/local/oakland-county/2021/09/13/former-aretha-franklin-lawyer-wants-159-k-estate-case/8324809002](https://detroitnews.com/story/news/local/oakland-county/2021/09/13/former-aretha-franklin-lawyer-wants-159-k-estate-case/8324809002)

## OAKLAND COUNTY

Mike Martindale

The Detroit News

Franklin is survived by four adult sons: Clarence, Edward, KeCalf and Theodore. The estate has often pitted the siblings against one another in an effort to have the final say on their late mother's wishes. ...There have been more than a dozen attorneys of record in the estate. KeCalf had as many as five attorneys watching out for his interests. Among them is Neal Nusholtz, who filed to withdraw from the case because he has not been paid his legal fees and planned to sue KeCalf for the estate. Callaghan granted his request after a brief hearing Monday.

“I didn’t have any choice,” Nusholtz told The News on Monday of dropping out of the still-percolating litigation. “I didn’t think I had any right to sue someone at the same time I was representing them.”...

Monday's hearing on Franklin's estate is one of several expected ahead of a tentative Jan. 27 trial.

"I got her respect," said Reed, an obvious reference to one of Franklin's more well-known hits and the title to a biopic released this summer on her life. "Now I also expect some (respect)."

The \$159,000 figure includes Reed's \$375-an-hour fee plus civil damages for Franklin's conversion of a record contract check "to her personal use." In an interview with The Detroit News, Reed claimed personal correspondence with Franklin, including emails, reveal she was appreciative of his efforts and believed if he was successful in obtaining a larger advance as she instructed, he would be entitled to a "bonus."

Reed maintains he was able to secure a \$500,000 advance for Franklin, better than triple what a recording company initially planned to pay her for the "Great Diva Classic Album," her last release.

"She had left multiple messages at my office seeking help to increase her recording contract advance from \$150,000 to \$300,000," Reed said. "I increased her advance by 325% to totaling \$500,000."

The first personal representative in the case, attorney Sabrina Owens, also Franklin's niece, resigned in March 2020 following challenges to how she was administrating the estate.

She was replaced by Turner, one of Franklin's friends and a prominent Detroit attorney. Attorneys for the respective brothers have contested fees paid out from the estate and the handling of property including several homes, a fleet of luxury vehicles, furs, jewelry and other personal property.

Turner, the appointed special representative, has two attorneys representing him in court matters.

Above this pyramid of legal power, the federal government demanded what it said was \$7.8 million in unpaid income tax by Franklin between 2010 and 2017. She was the subject of an IRS audit at the time of her death.

Last March, the Internal Revenue Service reached an agreement with the estate for another \$800,000 payment, 45% of future revenues and 40% to be held in escrow for future taxes.

About the same time of the IRS settlement, Franklin's four sons were to each receive initial payments of \$50,000 from the estate. Nusholtz told Callaghan on Monday he was largely responsible for the heirs receiving some funds now rather than losing it to tax penalties.

Complicating matters in the estate, Franklin died without leaving a last will and testament, although since her passing, four documents have surfaced which, depending on the view of attorneys, indicate her final wishes. Three were handwritten documents. The fourth "will" is an unsigned draft Franklin was reportedly working on since 2017 with a Detroit law firm.

While the documents all provide funds and property for each of her heirs, the bequests are not consistent nor in agreement on who should be executor.

A determination on the wills is expected in the coming months.

[mmartindale@detroitnews.com](mailto:mmartindale@detroitnews.com)

(248) 338-0319