

# Disbarred Yakima attorney sentenced to 2 years for theft

By [Donald W. Meyers](#)  
[dmeyers@yakimaherald.com](mailto:dmeyers@yakimaherald.com)

Yakima Herald  
June 30, 2015



Eric Vargas

A disbarred Yakima attorney is now a felon sentenced to prison for stealing money from a disabled client.

Eric Vargas, 58, was sentenced Thursday to two years after pleading guilty to first-degree theft for using a disabled client's trust fund to pay property taxes and other bills unrelated to the trust. Prosecutors agreed to drop 23 remaining counts of theft.

The sentence exceeded the state guidelines, which call for 90 days maximum for someone with Vargas' criminal history. Yakima County Prosecuting Attorney Joe Brusica said the extra time was warranted because of the nature of the crime.

"It's a major economic offense," he said in a phone interview Monday. "Being a lawyer, it is a breach of fiduciary trust and duty."

The fact that the victims were particularly vulnerable — an elderly woman with cancer and her disabled daughter — made the crime more serious, Brusica said, adding that had Vargas been convicted on all 24 counts, he could have gone to prison for up to eight years.

Brusica said the deal satisfied the victims' family and Vargas has made full restitution of \$109,000. That amount represents the trust fund, minus Vargas' fees for administering it, Brusica said.

The state Supreme Court, acting on a complaint filed with the Washington State Bar Association, disbarred Vargas in August as a result of the latest accusations.

According to court documents, Vargas was hired by a woman who had late-stage cancer to set up a trust fund for her developmentally disabled adult daughter in 2011. Brusic said the mother has since died.

Vargas received \$154,469, which he placed in his office trust fund and used to pay property taxes on a parcel he and his wife owned, court records show. He also used the trust money to cover checks to pay another client's insurance settlement and to pay doctor bills, according to an affidavit filed by Yakima police.

In July 2012, Vargas placed the remaining \$44,433 into a separate trust fund, the affidavit said. By October 2013, police said Vargas had used all but \$106 from the fund.

Since being admitted to the bar in 1991, Vargas has been disciplined twice. In 2006, the Supreme Court suspended Vargas' law license for two years following his 2005 conviction on drug possession charges.

Vargas was accused of using a 62-year-old woman he met at the Kennewick Senior Center to help him obtain prescription narcotics. He was sentenced to two months of work release and a year of probation and fined \$1,000.

The conviction was stricken from his record in 2012, according to court records.

In 2007, Vargas was sued unsuccessfully by a former employee who said she had been forced to quit because Vargas brought cocaine into the office, propositioned her, displayed a gun and told her stories of his drug-related activities.