Michael Winans Jr. Speaks Out Before Serving 14-Year Prison Sentence

Michael Winans Jr., of the prominent gospel-singing Winans family, was sentenced in February to nearly 14 years in prison for an $8 million Ponzi scheme carried out in Christian churches. Now, after a judge refused to delay the start of his sentence, Winans is speaking out.

“There are numerous stories out there that claim I stole millions of dollars from innocent people. That is not true,” Winans declares in a video statement posted Thursday on Vimeo and on his website, which aims to shed new light on his case after he was convicted of wire fraud and sentenced to 165 months in prison.

Winans—son of Michael Winans Sr., a member of the Gospel Hall of Fame quartet The Winans—pleaded guilty in October to lying to more than 1,000 people who thought they were investing in Saudi Arabian crude oil bonds. But he is now saying he is not fully to blame.

“I’m not blameless, and I’m willing to take responsibility for my mistakes. But I am not willing to take responsibility for what others did in my name,” he pleads. “Let it be clear: I did not start this investment. My name was used without my permission to solicit money by a lot of people, including Tim Hunt, the creator of the fraudulent oil investment.”

The 30-year-old recording artist and music producer claims he is only responsible for approximately $1.2 million in losses and says he has already paid back more than 75 percent to investors. Winans is blaming his attorney for his sentence.

“My attorney failed to do his job for me,” Winans explains in the video statement. “He told me not to comment at all on the case, even though I wanted to explain that I have paid back a lot of people. … He failed to make an objection to the claim that I was responsible for the losses by people I didn’t know and money that I never even received.”

Winans says he now has a defense team that is “exploring all of my options, trying to get me re-sentenced based on the amount of losses I’m responsible for and not those caused by others.”

The team, headed by attorney Frank D. Eaman, filed a motion on May 1 to Judge Sean Cox to extend the date Winans must self-surrender to the Federal Correctional Institute by 60 days so he could work with his lawyers on his case.

“We are disappointed that the Honorable Judge Cox did not grant the motion to extend Michael’s self-surrender date,” Eaman said in a written statement. “Michael wanted to continue working with his counsel and the government to clear up some major errors that occurred in this case. We will continue our appeal process.”

During Winans’ trial, Cox read some of the 50 letters written by the scheme’s victims, who say the Maryland native ruined their lives.

“This didn’t just impact people’s pockets,” Cox said. “Families broke up. The defendant would have people recruit other people for him. When this came out as a fraud, [investors] were not only upset with the defendant; they became upset with the people they gave money to.”

Eaman now says he and his team are working on establishing a re-sentencing based on crimes for which they believe Winans is responsible.

“The calculation of loss that Michael Winans is responsible for is a complicated matter that was never undertaken by

Michael Winans' trial counsel," Eaman states. "Currently, I am undertaking that calculation and it appears that Michael was held responsible for more than six times the amount of loss that he caused."

Winans "repented" in court on Feb. 27, insisting that he carried out the scheme in good faith, saying he wanted to help people better their lives.

"I caused financial and emotional damage," Winans told the judge. "For that I repent.

"There was zero malicious intent on my part," he added. "This investment was presented as a good thing to me, and I wanted people to have a better life."

Winans concluded his video by asking for "the benefit of the doubt, and also your prayers, until all of the facts have been presented." He is also accepting donations for his legal fund.

Watch Winans' video below.