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Sachs probing case of Mandel furniture

Annapolis (AP)—What once appeared to be a simple review of the legality of former Gov. Marvin Mandel's attempt to pay for furniture he took from the Governor's Mansion has turned into a broader investigation by the attorney general's office.

The 5-month-old probe is attempting to determine whether Mandel removed more furniture than previously acknowledged.

Also involved in the investigation is the status of money from the state treasury maintained in a special account to cover housekeeping operations at the mansion.

Stephen H. Sachs, the attorney general, said yesterday that his staff was nearing completion of its work and that he expected to present a report to Governor Hughes by the end of August.

"It's been as thorough and detailed as we could possibly do," added Mr. Sachs, who was brought into the situation by Mr. Hughes last March.

Published reports and press conference statements made by Governor Hughes indicated that Mr. Sachs simply had been requested by the Governor's office to review the legalities of the removal of the furniture.

The request came after Mandel gave the state a check to pay for items valued at \$3,187 which turned up missing in an inventory taken when he left the mansion following his 1977 federal conviction on corruption charges.

Governor Hughes said he wanted the legal review to determine whether Mandel could pay for and keep the furniture or whether it would have to be returned to the mansion.

However, the review has led to an investigation which, at times, has involved from six to eight members of Mr. Sachs's staff, according to a state government source.

Mr. Sachs declined to discuss details but acknowledged his subordinates have interviewed Mandel and his wife, Jeanne, at least twice.

He also said that furniture dealers had been interviewed; past and present man-

sion inventories had been studied and photos had been taken of the present contents of the mansion for comparison with old photos.

"Questions have arisen about the inventory," Mr. Sachs said of the accounting performed by the Department of General Services just after Mandel left the mansion.

Asked what he meant by questions, he replied: "Are there additional furniture and furnishings [missing] not covered by the check?"

The attorney general said the Governor's request for his assistance also asked him to determine whether the Mandel check "represented the value of all items" taken from the mansion.

The request for Mr. Sachs's assistance came in a letter to him March 7 from Judson P. Garrett, the Governor's staff attorney and chief legislative aide.

Mr. Garrett wrote of "an ongoing unresolved problem concerning furniture and other materials removed from Government House [the mansion] by or for former Gov. Mandel.

"Recently, this matter further developed with the delivery to the state of a check tendered in payment for removed furniture and a signed withdrawal slip relating to a housekeeping account maintained from state funds by Mrs. Mandel and her predecessors," Mr. Garrett continued.

Asked yesterday about the reference to the housekeeping account, Mr. Garrett said he could not recall specifics but thought "there was a question of whether that account had been transferred or not."

The letter said further that "a preliminary examination of the relevant facts reveals uncertainty or a difference of opinion between some personnel of Government House and the Mandels with respect to the removal, ownership and/or value of items purchased by General Services, and also questions relating to the legal status and ownership of items purchased from the Government House housekeeping account."