

Former deputy faces life sentence

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September 19, 2018

A man who once worked as a Dolores County Sheriff's Office deputy and as a corrections officer in Mesa County could be imprisoned for life for sexually abusing a Montrose child.

Joshua Hemphill on Monday pleaded guilty to class-3 felony sexual assault on a child by one in a position of trust. Multiple other counts were dismissed.

Hemphill also was charged with similar offenses in Mesa County, where court records show he pleaded guilty to sexual assault on a child as a pattern of abuse and sexual exploitation of a child.

Under the terms of his plea, Hemphill agreed to a sentence in the aggravated range — due to the number of incidents — and to serve 15-years-to-life under Colorado's indeterminate sentencing provisions.

Under indeterminate sentencing, certain offenders can be held up to the span of their natural life if they are deemed inappropriate for parole.

Hemphill's sentence is to run concurrent to the sentence that will be imposed in Mesa County, where his plea agreement calls for a 15-year-to-indeterminate sentence with 20 years of parole if he is granted release after serving the 15 years.

Hemphill was arrested in Montrose last August, a few weeks after he quit his job in Dolores County, where the Colorado Bureau of Investigation interviewed him concerning allegations made by a young man now living in South Dakota.

The man alleged that, as a child, Hemphill, who had been his adult mentor in the Partners program, abused him.

Hemphill was dismissed from the program in 2014 for not following its rules and protocols.

He was not charged in relation to the South Dakota witness' allegations, but those reports triggered an investigation that led the CBI to the Montrose victim.

According to past court testimony, Hemphill admitted to abusing the Montrose child and taking explicit photos as the boy slept. Hemphill's defense team contended the confession was false and the acts described were physically impossible.

The abuse was said to have occurred at locations in Grand Junction, Montrose and at Hemphill's Dove Creek home (Dolores County).

Court testimony and documents described Hemphill cultivating a relationship with the boy's family, who at one point allowed him to stay in the basement of their home.

The child's parents began to notice the amount of time Hemphill spent with their two sons, particularly the younger boy, as well as intense social media contact and texting.

They also noticed he seemed to lack adult relationships and came to believe he was not accepting their boundaries, including instances in which he took the children places without the parents' knowledge, according to past testimony.

After the CBI spoke with the parents, they cut off contact with Hemphill, and police told him to stay away from the home.

Hemphill was accused of then texting the child's father, triggering a restraining order and an allegation that he violated it. The resulting misdemeanor case from that incident was dismissed, court records show.

Hemphill was initially charged with 12 sex crimes in the Montrose case. He is set for sentencing here Nov. 26 on his plea to the single sex offense referenced above.

In Mesa County, Hemphill was initially charged with 14 offenses. Sentencing in that case was set for Nov. 16

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