

News

# ROCKWOOD: Former police officer arraigned on sex charges

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By Jackie Harrison-Martin

Twitter: [@JackieMartin22](https://twitter.com/JackieMartin22)

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ROCKWOOD — A former police officer sworn to protect and serve is facing three charges related to alleged sex crimes.

The Wayne County Prosecutor's Office issued one charge each of second- and fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct against Christian Zieminski, 33, as well as a charge of misconduct in office.

Second-degree criminal sexual conduct is a felony punishable by up to 15 years in prison upon conviction and misconduct in office is punishable by up to five years in prison.

Fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct is a high misdemeanor and is punishable by up to two years in prison.

According to Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy, it is alleged that Zieminski engaged in inappropriate sexual contact, using force or sexual coercion with a female prisoner who was in his custody at the time.

Zieminski turned himself in at about 10 a.m. today at 33rd District Court and was arraigned on the charges before Judge James Kersten.

A preliminary examination of the evidence against him is set for 1:30 p.m. Sept. 10.

He was released on a \$20,000 personal bond.

"These are very serious allegations that, if proven to be true, undermine the trust which citizens must have in our police officers," Worthy said in a press release. "We will treat Christian Zieminski just as we would any other defendant."

Rockwood Police Chief Stephen Rowe said this morning that when he was made aware of accusations against the officer he immediately turned the investigation over to the Michigan State Police.

Rowe said he wanted to ensure that the investigation was impartial and he wanted the public to see that decisions made in the case were unbiased.

Rowe expressed his disappointment at the turn of events in his department.

"This is depressing and sad," Rowe said. "I never wanted to see anything like this happen."

To his knowledge, he said, nothing remotely close to this has ever happened in the city's Police Department.

Rowe said it puts a temporary dark cloud over a department that has been dedicated to serving its residents.

Zieminski actually was fired July 6. Rowe said he was made aware of the charges against the former officer Monday evening.

"I just didn't know what the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office was going to do," Rowe said.

He said the department has handled the matter and will move forward confident that the public will keep in mind all of the good efforts in Rockwood.

"If you do everything aboveboard, the public will see your hard work," Rowe said. "We will have to let the chips fall where they may."

He said he does not intend to comment any further on Zieminski's separation from the department or on specifics of the case.

This is the second time in Zieminski's career in law enforcement that he has been terminated.

Zieminski was hired by the Rockwood Police Department in June 2007 under a cloud of controversy.

He had been fired from the Brownstown Township Police Department in 2006. At that time, Zieminski had been serving as the liaison officer at Woodhaven High School when police confirmed that he had an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old student.

Zieminski had been an officer in Brownstown for six years before being terminated.

As a township officer, Zieminski was assigned to the high school in September 2006, the same month he was married. The inappropriate contact with the student is believed to have taken place the following month.

It is not clear if the officer is still married.

An investigation then found Zieminski had inappropriate contact with the student on two occasions. The relationship was discovered after the teenager told several of her friends about the encounters.

Zieminski was recommended for hire in Rockwood by then-Rockwood Police Chief Russell VanWassehnova. He was approved by the City Council, which was unaware of the circumstances surrounding his termination in the township.

Former Mayor Philip Smalley later apologized to the community for not telling the council why Zieminski had been fired in Brownstown.

Zieminski was described as "remorseful" and "very apologetic" when he left the Brownstown police force.

A Rockwood resident questioned the board at the time and asked how Zieminski could have been the best applicant out of 15 to be the city's new officer.

At the time of his hiring in Rockwood, VanWassehnova said Zieminski deserved a second chance.

**Contact Staff Writer Jackie Harrison-Martin at 1-734-246-0837 or Jackie@heritage.com. Follow her on Facebook and @JackieMartin22 on Twitter.**

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