

Judge rules prostitution case against 13-year Metro veteran will move forward

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- For months, Metro tracked officer's visits to prostitute, report says

The case against a former Metro officer accused of soliciting prostitution will move forward after a judge today ruled the onetime cop was not being vindictively prosecuted.

Peter Connell is charged with five counts of soliciting prostitution. The charges stem from a months-long investigation into the officer who had been on the force for 13 years.

Judge William Kephart set the case for a Sept. 12 bench trial in Las Vegas Township Justice Court.

Defense attorney Abel Yanez argued Connell was being prosecuted only because he'd previously been fired from Metro for similar conduct, fought the termination in court and won his job back.

Yanez asked the judge to consider why there were at least 22 other men — one of whom was worked for Metro — who were investigated for the same conduct as Connell, but who weren't charged. Some of the men admitted to the same conduct but escaped punishment, Yanez pointed out. Yanez did not know if the other officer had admitted to anything.

"I'm not trumping up things in the past," prosecutor Marc Schifalacqua argued. "This is all-new, after-the-fact conduct."

Kephart asked whether Connell's court victory should protect him forever.

"I'm not saying that he has a blank check and (can) commit any crime" Yanez said.

But the only difference between Connell and the other people who were also investigated was that Connell had invoked his constitutional right to challenge his termination from Metro. Had the other implicated officer been charged, Yanez said, there would be no argument.

"No one else in his same identical shoes is being prosecuted," Yanez said.

Kephart questioned if this was the first time the other officer had been accused of soliciting a prostitute, pointing out that the District Attorney's Office may have chosen to use its wide discretion to only pursue the person who had a history of similar allegations.

Yanez said he didn't know and it was the prosecution's job to provide him with that information.

Kephart, though, noted the District Attorney's Office had wide discretion in determining whom to prosecute. He ruled the case would proceed.

According to a Metro report, in October 2012 when an on-duty patrol officer saw Connell in an area downtown frequented by prostitutes, Connell identified himself as a Metro officer. The officer told his supervisor, and investigators started looking more closely at Connell's activities.

Vice detectives tracked Connell in early 2013 while he was still on the force. During a three-month period, he made five trips to an apartment in the 5000 block of South Maryland Parkway, where he would meet a 58-year-old woman.

During their investigation, detectives reported seeing up to seven men come and go from the apartment at various intervals during a single day.

When the detectives questioned the woman, she admitted she had about 50 customers who pay her for sexual services. She initially denied knowing Connell, but later told detectives Connell would pay her for oral sex.

In June 2013, a summons was issued for Connell to appear in court on charges of soliciting prostitution.