

## Family of jail guard suspected of abusing inmate: 'We know you didn't do it'

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[2010 Cop Rapist](#) Christopher Stein Epperson

Federal court • Christopher Stein Epperson faces up to life in prison if convicted on charges stemming from alleged sexual abuse of a female inmate.

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Family members of a former Wasatch County deputy sheriff indicted in U.S. District Court for allegedly sexually assaulting a female inmate sobbed and collapsed into each other's arms as the man was taken from a courtroom Thursday in handcuffs.

"We know you didn't do it!" the mother of Christopher Stein Epperson of Heber City called out to her son as U.S. marshals led him away after his arraignment before U.S. Magistrate Paul Warner. Epperson's wife stretched out her arm toward the man and cried, "I love you!"

Epperson, 33, is charged with felony deprivation of rights under color of law for his purported sexual misconduct, according to the indictment filed Wednesday.

He has pleaded not guilty to the charges. Epperson's family, through his attorney, Randall Spencer, declined to comment about the case after Thursday's hearing.

Warner tentatively set a seven-day trial for Epperson in August. A detention hearing will be held Monday, but Epperson meanwhile will remain locked up in the custody of U.S. marshals.

Warner asked that he be kept apart from the jail's general population so he won't be targeted by other inmates because of his history in law enforcement.

"Is he being segregated? I want that to happen for his own safety," Warner told marshals.

Epperson is accused of touching the breasts of a 34-year-old inmate, identified as "J.H." in court documents, in December 2009 while working as a guard at the county jail. He is also accused in other court documents of peeping on the inmate as she undressed, forcing her into a corner where he groped her and forced her to fondle him, sexually assaulting the woman in her cell and attempting to sodomize her.

The Utah Department of Public Safety and FBI investigated the inmate's claims, which led to the indictment.

Epperson faces up to life in prison and a maximum of \$750,000 in fines if found guilty.

The color of law charge is one reserved for public officials such as judges, prosecutors or those in law enforcement who abuse their authority, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office. The FBI generally investigates color of law cases.

Authorities arrested Epperson on Wednesday afternoon.

The woman, whom The Salt Lake Tribune is not identifying because she is an alleged victim of sexual assault, filed a civil lawsuit in 2010 against Epperson, the county and the sheriff's department. Investigators approached her about the abuse after an outside witness reported what went on at the jail. She later filed the lawsuit after the criminal investigation into Epperson was under way.

Her civil complaint states that she was an inmate at the Wasatch County Jail from September 2009 through April 2010, after being convicted for illegally distributing prescription drugs. In November 2009, Epperson began making comments about her physical appearance.

"He overly flirted with her by smiling and winking at her," the complaint states. Mild flirting turned into "lurid, sexual comments" as the months passed and in December 2009, Epperson ordered the victim to display her breasts so he could photograph her, according to the complaint.

The victim alleges several other jail guards witnessed the harassment and did nothing to stop it, the complaint states.

Epperson also showed the inmate photos of his own genitalia on several occasions, according to the complaint.

The victim's civil complaint alleges that Epperson's conduct violated her constitutional rights under the Fourth Amendment, her due process rights and her right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment under the Eighth Amendment. She is asking for an unspecified amount of damages, and the case remains pending before U.S. District Judge David Sam.

"Deputy Epperson's conduct summarized what constitutes willful misconduct, assault, battery and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Wasatch County is responsible to ensure the safe and appropriate treatment of inmates by its guards, deputies and other inmates," the complaint states.

"Wasatch County failed to provide appropriate mechanisms, including policies, procedures and monitoring devices and mechanisms, to prevent and discover sexual abuse of inmates by guards."

Attorney Frank Mylar, who is representing the county in the case, said the county did not have knowledge of Epperson's behavior but believes the sexual abuse occurred.

"At least one inmate is a witness to some of this misconduct, yet that inmate failed to disclose this misconduct to jail officers," the attorney wrote in court documents.

"While defendants lack personal knowledge of any of this misconduct, upon information and belief, Epperson did engage in the alleged ... misconduct with [the victim]."

Epperson was terminated from his position at the jail, Mylar wrote in court documents.

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*The Salt Lake Tribune*