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# Former FHP trooper pleads guilty to lesser charges in sexual coercion case

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By Susan Spencer-Wendel, The Palm Beach Post  
9:33 p.m. EST, February 7, 2011

WEST PALM BEACH— A one-time [Florida Highway Patrol](#) trooper accused of using his authority to exact sex from a female driver pleaded guilty on Monday to simple battery and official misconduct.

As part of the plea deal 33-year-old Ariel Valentin entered — on the eve of a jury trial — he must serve five years of probation and never seek a position as a law enforcement officer again. The first year of his probation must be served on house arrest.

Valentin also left the courtroom a convicted felon and must undergo a psychosexual evaluation.



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Still, it was a deal for the former trooper who once faced the first-degree felony of sexual battery while in position of control or authority — a crime punishable by up to 30 years in prison.

Without comment to the judge, Valentin entered pleas of guilty to simple battery and official misconduct. His defense attorney, Darren Shull, said outside court that neither he nor Valentin's family would be commenting.

According to police, the victim said Valentin pulled her over after she was involved in a car accident near her Palm Springs home. After he told the other driver to leave the scene, she said, Valentin asked whether she minded being searched and she agreed, getting out of her car and turning her pockets inside-out, according to police.

Valentin then said he needed to search her further and suggested going to her home, according to the interview. Once there, the woman said, Valentin told her to remove her clothes and then coerced her into having sex, according to police.

The woman said her registration was expired and she was "scared of going to jail."

When first interviewed about the incident, Valentin told Palm Springs police that he simply followed the woman to her home and issued her a citation. He later said the two had consensual sex.

On Monday in court, the woman expressed through prosecutor Bryan Poulton happiness that Valentin will no longer be a law enforcement officer.

He resigned from the highway patrol after his arrest in 2009.

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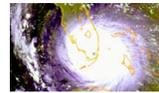
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