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Former detentions deputy sentenced to 16 months for sexually assaulting inmate

BY JASON KOTOWSKI Californian staff writer jkotowski@bakersfield.com

Calling the actions of Ralph James Kress Jr. "reprehensible," a Kern County judge sentenced the former detentions deputy to 16 months in prison and lifetime registration as a sex offender for sexually assaulting a female inmate.

Kress was out of custody and stood next to his attorney as Judge Charles R. Brehmer handed down the sentence. Kress appeared to look back at the audience as he was placed in handcuffs before being led out of the courtroom.

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Former Kern County detention officer Ralph James Kress, right, is taken into custody after being sentenced to a prison term for sexually assaulting a female inmate at the Mojave jail.



Two felony charges against Kress -- assault by a public officer and oral copulation by use of force -- were dismissed in return for pleading no contest to a felony charge of dissuading a witness from reporting and misdemeanor touching a person for sexual arousal against their will, court records show. He had faced a maximum of eight years in prison if convicted of all charges.

Brehmer said Tuesday morning that he could sentence Kress to probation, but he wasn't going to. The judge said Kress took advantage of a position of trust, and the victim in this case was "extremely vulnerable."

Prosecutor Melissa Allen had asked that Kress be sentenced to three years in prison, but afterward said she understood why Brehmer instead chose the 16-month sentence given Kress's lack of a previous criminal record.

Allen said the victim was "doing well" given what she'd been through. No other inmates reported being assaulted by him, she said.

Kress, who had been a Kern County sheriff's detentions deputy for five years, was arrested March 9 following an investigation he had sexually assaulted an inmate in December. The victim had been in jail on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon and vandalism, according to deputies.

The assault happened while the victim was being booked into the Mojave facility, a short-term confinement center that houses up to six inmates at a time. Inmates are typically transported to Bakersfield within 24 hours or released.

Kress was put on leave immediately following the sheriff's department's administrative investigation, and no longer works for the department. His attorney, Richard Loa, could not be reached for comment.

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