

Ex-Cop Used Girl, 7, As 'Sex Toy'

Suspect Faces Life Behind Bars If Convicted

INDIO (CBS) A former Desert Hot Springs police officer on trial for child molestation started making sexual advances on a female relative when she was 7, and the girl "became his sex toy" over a decade of abuse, a prosecutor told jurors Tuesday.

Dennis Paul Decker, 37, is accused of molesting the girl and her friend, both of whom were part of a police Explorer program he ran.

"He raped her, orally copulated her and penetrated her," Deputy District Attorney Victoria Cameron said. "This child had to endure unspeakable things."

When the girl resisted his advances or threatened to tell someone, Decker would tell her such a revelation would break up their family and he would be sent to jail.

"This little child became his sex toy," she said, adding that the girl, now 18, would take the witness stand to tell jurors exactly what happened.

From the outside, the family appeared normal, Cameron said, "but behind closed doors, he committed one crime after another on this child."

The girl eventually suffered psychological consequences and started cutting herself, Cameron said.

Nearly half of the original 37 charges against Decker were dropped, but he still faces life behind bars if convicted.

Arrested in Marina del Rey on Sept. 26, 2006, Decker is charged with 20 counts, including aggravated sexual assault on a child, rape and lewd acts with a child.

The two alleged victims were in the Explorers Program, which allows teenagers to ride along with police and perform tasks at the station.

Decker's defense attorney, John Patrick Dolan, said the prosecution's case is a "house of cards."

"This case began with 49 counts and at the time of the prelim (preliminary hearing) was down to 37 and is now at 20 ... because when it comes to actually proving the case they have to keep dismissing the counts. The jury will dismiss the remaining 20 counts."

Collectively, Dolan and Cameron have fewer than 100 witnesses who could be called to testify.

Dolan said he planned to call Decker's friends and family to testify on his client's behalf, as well as his teenage son and the boy's girlfriend. Several Desert Hot Springs police officers also have been subpoenaed.

Prosecutors will rely on testimony of the two girls and other "solid evidence," according to Michael Jeandron of the Riverside County District Attorney's Office.

Prosecutors allege Decker molested the relative, who is now 18, over a 10-year period starting in 1996. Authorities allege the other girl was molested over a one-year period while she was a member of the Explorers program.

Decker founded and supervised the Explorers in Desert Hot Springs and also worked as a resource officer at Desert Hot Springs High School and Desert Springs Middle School. He is being held at the Indio Jail in lieu of \$2 million bail.



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