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Ex-deputy convicted of misconduct with teen girl

Gabriel Pizzini, who faces a minimum of 6½ years in prison, was denied release on bond pending his sentencing

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Gabriel Pizzini, the former Marion County Sheriff's deputy who was standing trial this week on charges of lewd and lascivious conduct on a 14-year-old girl, was found guilty of all counts Thursday afternoon.

The six-member jury deliberated for an hour and a half.

Pizzini, 43, was remanded into custody following the verdict, despite his attorney's attempts to keep him free on bond. He will be sentenced once a pre-sentencing investigation ordered by Circuit Judge Edward Scott is complete.

Over the course of a three-day trial, prosecutors charged that the former law enforcement officer abused his authority in February 2007 while transporting a 14-year-old girl from her foster home to the Juvenile Assessment Center for missing school.

They claimed he groped her during a routine pat-down search for weapons, then stalled his patrol car on a side street where he coerced her to show her breasts so he could snap a Polaroid photo.

That photo was later recovered from Pizzini's squad car. It had been placed in his day planner stuck inside the sun visor of his car. Authorities claim he tried to throw the photo under the car before it was seized.

A 15-year veteran of law enforcement who had been a deputy with the Sheriff's Office for just one year prior to his arrest, Pizzini denied touching the girl in any inappropriate way. He testified that her friend took the photo, then left it in his car.

The counts against Pizzini included lewd and lascivious molestation of a child, lewd and lascivious conduct, lewd and lascivious solicitation and attempted evidence tampering.

Due to the nature of the charges, Pizzini will be designated a sex offender.



SPECIAL

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According to prosecutor Jennifer Kipke, Pizzini faces a minimum 6½ years in prison.

"My feeling is that a corrupt police officer who hid behind his badge to prey upon young girls has been convicted and will hopefully never be in a position to do this kind of thing again to anybody else," co-prosecutor Tim McCourt said.

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