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Former Jackson County Deputy Sentenced to 14 Years in Prison for Civil Rights Violation

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Sexually Abused Teen Girl While She Was Detained

WASHINGTON, April 9 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- A former Jackson County, Mo., sheriff's deputy was sentenced in federal court today for violating the civil rights of a teenage girl whom he sexually assaulted in his patrol car, the Justice Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri announced today.

Steven W. Burgess, 35, of Independence, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Orlie D. Smith this morning to 14 years in federal prison without parole.

On Nov. 12, 2009, Burgess pleaded guilty to depriving a 15-year-old girl of her Constitutional rights by sexually assaulting her while she was in his custody. Burgess was on-duty and in uniform when he encountered the victim and some friends in Haynes Park in Sibley, Mo., at approximately 2 a.m. on July 24, 2007. Burgess told the victim's friends to leave the park, but ordered her to stay at the park with him.

Burgess then put the victim in handcuffs and, while patting her down, inappropriately touched her in a sexual manner. Burgess removed the handcuffs and told her to get into the car, keeping the door open and her feet touching the ground outside the car. Burgess stood in front of her and compelled her to perform oral sex on him while she sat in his patrol vehicle. At one point, Burgess made her get on her knees to perform oral sex on him.

Afterward, Burgess took the victim to her aunt's house. He told her that she could not tell anyone about the forced oral sex, or he would disclose that she had been caught in the park drinking. Once inside the house, she told her family what had happened and was immediately taken to Children's Mercy Hospital.

Burgess violated the victim's right not to be deprived of liberty without due process of law, which includes the right to bodily integrity. Burgess used force against his victim and placed her in fear of death, serious bodily injury and kidnapping.

"A law enforcement officer who abuses his authority by sexually assaulting a child not only violates the law, but also the child's civil rights and the public trust," Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez for the Civil Rights Division said. "Today's sentence should remind any law enforcement officer inclined to violate the most basic Constitutional rights of our citizens that we will aggressively prosecute."

"No one is above the law," U.S. Attorney Beth Phillips said. "When a uniformed law enforcement officer violates the civil rights of a vulnerable victim, especially in such a repugnant manner, he must be held to the highest standard of justice. Today's lengthy prison sentence holds this defendant accountable for violating the public trust and abusing his position of authority to victimize a young girl. We are sending a strong message to our community that civil rights violations won't be tolerated."

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney K. Michael Warner and Trial Attorney Eric L. Gibson with the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division. It was investigated by the Jackson County Sheriff's Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

SOURCE U.S. Department of Justice

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