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Deputy facing capitol sex charges

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BILL GAMBLIN

A Santa Rosa County Deputy who has been in jail since Tuesday is now facing new charges.

John Mitchell Tomlinson, 46 of Navarre, is now facing five capitol counts of sexual battery involving a new victim following a Florida Departments Law Enforcement's investigation.

On Tuesday officers with the FDLE arrested Tomlinson on 120 counts of sexual battery on a child between the ages of 12 and 18.

Back on March 3, the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's asked the FDLE to investigate allegations of Tomlinson having sexual relations with a minor.

Tomlinson was arraigned on Friday in Walton County and will be arraigned there on Monday at 9 a.m.

Sheriff Wendell Hall placed Tomlinson on paid administrative leave according to Marc Ward with the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office. Tomlinson is expected to remain on leave until the criminal process is resolved.

"If these allegations are true I will be very disappointed in Lt. Tomlinson's behavior," Sheriff Wendell Hall said in a statement. "However, if he's found guilty he should be punished like any other person that commits this type of crime."

Tomlinson, a former District Supervisor in Navarre, was working at the Santa Rosa County Courthouse as the head of the security detail provided by the Sheriff's Office.

When questioned on why Tomlinson was not put on leave when the allegations came to light back on March 3, Ward declined to comment, but said he would answer that on a later date. Ward did not respond to the question by press time.

Tomlinson was booked into the Santa Rosa County Jail and his bond was set at \$845,000.

Unfortunately, since the first of the year this marks the 33rd sexual offense logged by the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office as of March 9.

According to Tammy Burton, Director of the Santa Rosa



enlarge

John Mitchell Tomlinson

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County Kids House, this is not a new phenomenon.

“Sex abuse is not a new phenomenon,” Burton said. “It is coming to light more with the increasing awareness in the community and within civic groups.

“There has been improvement in effectively educating adults as to what to look for when it comes to possible cases of sexual abuse involving children.”

While Santa Rosa County has 33 cases so far our neighbors to the east in Okaloosa County have had 23 cases reported and looking to the west in Escambia County only seven reports have been made.

Overall in the three county areas going back to 2007, Santa Rosa County leads with 424 offenses, while Okaloosa had 392.

Not all sexual offenses reported lead to an arrest as some of them are unfounded or in some cases the victims fail to cooperate with law enforcement to bring the perpetrator to justice.

“In the past some wanted to just sweep it under the rug, but we attempt to hold any offender accountable for their actions,” Burton said. “In many cases some might start to suspect this type of abuse, but they don’t make the connection.”

Sexual offenses such as these are the reason for the creation of the Santa Rosa Kids House on North Stewart Street in Milton, which houses several of the agencies utilized to assist the children and their families from the Department of Children and Families, an office for State Attorney Bill Eddins, as well as the counselors provided by Lutheran Services of Florida.

When it comes to dealing with the victims of this, there is a standard protocol and accepted procedures that are adhered to.

“We follow the trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy procedures,” said Nancy Hagman, Program Coordinator/Therapist for the Physical and Sexual Abuse Program in Santa Rosa and Escambia County. “It can be a long healing process, but the sooner they enter treatment the better.”

Hagman noted the counseling runs between three to six months with some taking longer, but depending on the age of the child when the abuse occurs, there could be follow up counseling that is needed.

“If you look at a five year old victim they could be doing just fine after therapy, but then as they approach puberty they could need more help due to perceived thoughts and perceptions.”

Hagman pointed out other stages this could occur could even involve the victim getting into a committed relationship, marriage, or even having a child of their own.

“As they approach these developmental milestones in life they could need even more help,” Hagman said. “Without this bridge they might not ever get through it even though it is part of their history and influences their decisions.


“These issues resides in the victims feelings and therapy allows the shame and guilt to be released. It also helps them learn and realize what happened is not their fault.”

Hagman pointed out most of the counseling sessions are done more in a group setting, which allows those to share their feelings, which is a more accepted practice.

Sexual Offenses with child victims

County	2007	2008	2009	2010
Santa Rosa	149	115	127	33
Escambia	32	37	46	7
Okaloosa	124	120	125	23

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