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## ND police chief, ex-judge charged in abuse case

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A southwestern North Dakota police chief and former state district judge has been charged with 52 felonies accusing him of molesting and attempting to rape a young girl over the course of about five years, authorities said Friday.

By: DALE WETZEL, Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A southwestern North Dakota police chief and former state district judge has been charged with 52 felonies accusing him of molesting and attempting to rape a young girl over the course of about five years, authorities said Friday.

Elgin Police Chief Randall Hoffman, 55, is accused of having sexual contact with the girl beginning in 2005, when she was 12 or 13 years old, a criminal complaint said. It alleges Hoffman "engaged in at least 50 sexual acts" with the girl, who is now 17, from August 2008 until this month, then attempted to rape her Wednesday.

Hoffman is charged with a single count each of gross sexual imposition and continuous sexual abuse of a child. The sex abuse charge carries a maximum penalty of life in prison without the possibility of parole. He also faces 50 counts of corruption or solicitation of a minor, each of which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Elgin is a community of about 700 people 90 miles southwest of Bismarck, and Hoffman was its only police officer, prosecutors said. He had been chief since 2005, Mayor Duane Schatz said.

Hoffman, who is being held at Mercer County jail in Stanton, appeared by video Friday before South Central District Judge Thomas Schneider in Bismarck and was ordered held on a \$500,000 cash bond. His next court appearance is Oct. 11.

During the video hearing, Hoffman requested a court-appointed lawyer and said nothing about the allegations against him. He did not respond Friday to telephone messages for him left on the jail's voicemail system.

If released on bond, Hoffman must not carry guns or go within 1,000 feet of the girl's home. He would be under electronic monitoring at his own expense, the judge ruled. He also must not drink or use any drugs for which he does not have a prescription.

"I don't have an alcohol problem. I don't do drugs," a subdued Hoffman, dressed in a dark green jail uniform with his wrists cuffed together in front of him, said after listening to his release restrictions.

Jim Vukelic, the Grant County state's attorney, argued that Hoffman might flee the state if released, to which Hoffman responded, "I have family in central North Dakota who would be willing to be responsible for me during the interim period."

Schatz said Friday that Hoffman has been put on administrative leave since his arrest Wednesday. Vukelic said Hoffman's status as a special Grant County deputy sheriff has been revoked.

Grant County Sheriff Steven Bay did not respond Friday to telephone and e-mail messages seeking comment. Bay and a Bureau of Criminal Investigation agent arrested Hoffman on Wednesday, Vukelic said.

Hoffman was a state district judge in Jamestown for almost five years before resigning in April 1999, after a disciplinary complaint accused him of showing disrespect for the court system. Hoffman had criticized another judge's handling of his divorce case.

Hoffman was later twice suspended from practicing law and ordered to undergo anger management counseling. Court documents also show he was accused of stalking his former wife.

Hoffman ran unsuccessfully for Stutsman County prosecutor a year after his resignation, and sought election in 2002 to the same judgeship he had left. Earlier that year, he asked Gov. John Hoeven to appoint him to an East Central District judgeship in Fargo, saying in a letter that his previous difficulties were nothing to worry about and he had "high moral character." Hoffman did not make a list of finalists for the job.

During the bond hearing, Vukelic said the number of charges against Hoffman were "purposely underestimated" and that there was "strong corroboration" for allegations detailed in a Bureau of Criminal Investigation affidavit in the case. Schneider ordered the document sealed.

In arguing for a high bond, Vukelic said Hoffman's wife had described him as "a volatile and angry person" and said the girl and her family "have every reason to fear retribution."

"He has nothing to lose," Vukelic said.

In July 1999, after Hoffman had resigned his judgeship and was working as a private lawyer, the North Dakota Supreme Court suspended him from practicing law for six months and ordered him to undergo anger counseling.

While he was a judge, Hoffman used obscene language to refer to an order issued by another judge in Hoffman's divorce case, according to court records.

Hoffman had also harassed and stalked his former wife, sitting outside her home for hours at night and approaching her on a golf course to thrust his middle finger in her face, the court's ruling said.

In October 2003, the Supreme Court ordered Hoffman suspended from practicing law for a year because of three separate instances of alleged misconduct.

Hoffman attempted to bully the former boyfriend of his fiancée, with whom she had a child, into agreeing to a visitation schedule with the child just before Hoffman and the woman were to be married, court records say.

When the former boyfriend refused, Hoffman later demanded that he answer a series of intrusive questions about his sexual relationship with Hoffman's fiancée, court records say.

Hoffman no longer has a license to practice law.

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Online:

Supreme Court disciplinary ruling against Hoffman, 1999: <http://bit.ly/d6qoWh>

Supreme Court disciplinary ruling against Hoffman, 2003: <http://bit.ly/9Rscvy>

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