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Another ex-NPD officer sentenced for sex offense

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Curt Prendergast

Victor Valenzuela

Victor Valenzuela stands in front of Judge James A. Soto during his sentencing on Monday at Superior Court.

Posted: Friday, November 23, 2012 12:00 am | Updated: 5:01 pm, Wed Nov 21, 2012.

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...t year for having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old ...tion and two months in jail on Monday at Santa Cruz County Superior Court.

...ficer in the past four years to be convicted and sentenced for sex offenses involving underage girls.

...he pleaded guilty to one count of sexual conduct with a ...nce a prison sentence of up to two years, said Judge James A. Soto.

"I'm placing the defendant on probation because he has no prior criminal record and he seems genuinely remorseful for what he did," Soto said. "Also, based on the evaluation and my review of the files it is my belief that he is not likely to re-offend in the future."

In addition to probation and jail time, Valenzuela will have to register as a sex offender and enroll in a sex offender treatment program. He is prohibited from contacting the victim or the victim's family and will have

to pay a \$250 assessment fee and \$65 monthly probation service fees.

"I just want to apologize for causing such angst to the victim and her family, to my family," Valenzuela said. "I paid a very heavy price for this. I have lost my job, something that I can never, ever have again."

"My actions do not reflect the kind of person that I truly am," Valenzuela said.

He asked Judge Soto for leniency, saying: "I am a man of family and I don't want to be away from them. I have a lot of friends and family, sir, and I can't do without them."

The public seating area in the courtroom held more than a dozen of his friends and family.

"The offense is what it is, but it can be on a scale of: how predatory, how scary is this?" said Valenzuela's attorney, Michael Storie.

"I know that weighing heavily on this courtroom is that he was a police officer at the time," Storie said. "This is not him running someone on his computer, finding out where she lives, is she single, these types of things. Those things all are scary, when they use their position and their access to these things to further themselves.

"None of this happened in Victor's case," he said.

Instead, Storie said, Valenzuela interacted with the girl through "that whole Facebook sharing friends thing."

'Troubling' trend

"It is troubling to the court, frankly, that there's been at least two cases before involving police officers that went to

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prison under similar types of situations,” Soto said during the hearing.

In May 2010, a 29-year-old NPD officer, Mariano Garibay, was arrested for having sex with a 16-year-old member of the department’s Explorers program. Soto eventually sentenced him to two years and three months in prison.

In 2006, a D.A.R.E. officer with the NPD, Ramon Fernando Borbon, was arrested for sexually assaulting a 19-year-old woman and sexually abusing another 16-year-old girl in 2005. He was later convicted and sentenced in 2008 to 9 1/2 years in prison.

“I would have thought that sending two other police officers to prison for engaging in sexual activities with minors would have sent a message throughout the police department. And yet here we are again with a third case,” Soto said.

“I don’t understand, frankly, why the officers can’t seem to get the message that you can not be engaging in sex with minors.”

“You should have known better,” he told Valenzuela.

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