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Hillsborough deputy called teen girl 'lover,' record states

By Jessica Vander Velde and Dan Sullivan, Times Staff Writers
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RIVERVIEW — The man was 39; the girl, 15. In a text message, he called her "lover," court records show. Behind her mother's back, between furtive phone calls, the man and the minor had sex, authorities say.

The man would have known that's a crime.

Deputy William Todd Best, a 10-year veteran of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, was charged Friday with sexual battery and lewd and lascivious battery after the girl's mother reported her suspicions.

Authorities say he had sex multiple times with the teen, both at his Riverview house and at her home. At least once, Best had been entrusted to take care of the teen, an arrest affidavit states.

Best was temporarily suspended without pay. He will be fired, sheriff's spokesman Larry McKinnon said.

The department's Internal Affairs investigators started looking into the case in late April.

In November, the mother, who had dated Best, started noticing that her daughter and Best were texting each other a lot, the court record states.

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away empty-
handed

She also noticed "secretive telephone conversations and hand-holding," between November and April.

She checked her daughter's phone at one point and saw a text conversation between the two.

"Good morning, Lover! XOXOXOXO," Best wrote, according to court records. He also wrote: "I will kiss it and make it better."

When Best accused the girl of not loving him anymore, she responded with "I love you like freakin crazy, baby!!"

Investigators interviewed the teen and found there was probable cause to arrest Best.

There is no evidence that any of the alleged activities happened while Best was on duty or that he used his position to intimidate the girl, McKinnon said.

Best was a traffic enforcement deputy in southeast Hillsborough County.

Earlier this year, a 34-year-old Hillsborough woman sued Best for child support. In court records, she states that they have an 18-month-old daughter together.

Best has contested the paternity. A mediation conference is scheduled for May 25.

This was the first time the Sheriff's Office has investigated or disciplined Best, McKinnon said.

Best was booked into the Hillsborough County Jail, where he remained without bail.

Times staff writer Ileana Morales and news researcher Caryn Baird contributed to this report. Jessica Vander Velde can be reached at (813) 226-3433 or jvandervelde@sptimes.com.

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