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College police officer charged with possession of child pornography

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Photo by Curt Brown Christopher Branco, 43, of Westport is charged with possession of child pornography for allegedly video recording the girl in 2000. He was arraigned in district court in Fall River.

By **Curt Brown**
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FALL RIVER — A campus police officer at Bristol Community College's Fall River campus was arraigned Monday on charges he secretly video recorded a female relative using the bathroom at his Westport home.

Christopher Branco, 43, is charged with possession of child pornography for allegedly video recording the female in April 2000.

The offense is a felony, according to Westport Detective Jeffrey Majewski, and the maximum penalty is a five-year state prison sentence.

According to court documents, Branco and his wife are estranged and she found the 8-millimeter cassette tape in a household safe and gave it to police. There were also naked photos and many pairs of women's underwear in the safe.

Majewski said the camera was concealed on a shelf in a bathroom closet and was pointed at the toilet.

"She did the right thing by turning over the evidence to police," he said. "It is a sensitive issue, but he needs to be held accountable for it."

Police said Branco's wife has obtained a restraining order against him.

Majewski said Branco has formerly worked as a police officer in Rhode Island in Little Compton and Newport, and as a security officer at St. Anne's Hospital, Fall River.

Prosecutor Kristen Spooner said the victim, who was 15 at the time of the incident, made the accusation against Branco when she met with Westport police on March 7.

According to court documents, Branco would allegedly stick his hands in her pants and would wrestle and "roughhouse" with her.

Spooner said Branco is seen and heard on the videotape, setting up the video equipment in the bathroom of his home. She said Branco's wife identified his voice and also identified a T-shirt he was wearing on the videotape.

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According to court documents, Branco is seen on the video, adjusting the recorder numerous times before he exits the bathroom and the victim enters and uses the bathroom.

About two minutes after the victim leaves the bathroom, Branco enters and retrieves the recorder from the closet shelf, according to court documents.

Spooner asked the court to impose \$5,000 cash bail, which was opposed by defense attorney Joseph Silvia, who said his client has no criminal record, is well-known in the community and is at no risk to flee prosecution.

A not guilty plea was entered in Branco's behalf and he was released on personal recognizance by Judge Thomas S. Barrett. Branco was issued a warning that if he is arrested again while this case is pending, he could be held for up to 60 days.

Branco was also told to have no contact with the victim in the case and to report weekly to the court's probation department.

The case was continued for a pre-trial hearing on May 11 in Fall River District Court.

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