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## Former Manatee sheriff's lieutenant charged with child molestation gets trial date pushed back

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MANATEE -- A former Manatee County Sheriff's Office lieutenant charged with molesting two girls was granted a later trial date by a Manatee County judge Thursday morning.

Dale Couch, 51, was charged with three counts of child molestation on May 23, 2012. The 20-year veteran resigned his position with the sheriff's office the day he was arrested.

Couch appeared before Manatee County Judge Charles E. Roberts Thursday, as his attorney requested more time to prepare his defense.

"It has come to my attention during depositions that there may be more witnesses and discovery," Hagopian said. "There is just no way I will be ready by April, I have made my best efforts."

Hagopian also mentioned pending cases in Manatee and Hillsborough counties that were somehow related but he had not been able to look into yet.

Assistant State Attorney Dawn Buff was neither in favor nor against the delay, she said.

Roberts, reluctant because of urging from the state Legislature to expedite cases, granted the motion. The trial was rescheduled for Aug. 18.

A second motion to compel the prosecution to hand over one of the alleged victim's medical records was not heard due to an error in scheduling. A hearing on the matter will be reset.

"Your next mandatory appearance will be your docket sounding on Aug. 6 unless this matter is handled beforehand," Roberts said.

Couch did not speak at the hearing other than to affirm he understood this.

Roberts questioned both attorneys if a sentence recommendation had been decided at this point in the case. Both stated no and gave the indication that there would not be any sort of plea agreement in the future.

Couch last appeared in court on Oct. 21, when Manatee County Judge Thomas Krug granted the defense's prior motion to compel discovery material.

Initially, accusations against Couch were investigated after a complaint was filed on July 25, 2012, which led to an internal affairs investigation. Couch was suspended throughout the investigation and later returned to duty on Nov. 22, 2012, when the State Attorney's Office said charges would not be field.

Charges were filed after the case was reopened early last year after one of the children making accusations against Couch made a disclosure to a therapist.

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