

December 17, 2013 9:00AM

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Former Ripley officer sentenced to prison

CHARLESTON - Former Ripley Police officer George Michael Puskas II was sentenced December 9 in U.S. District Court in Charleston to a prison sentence of one year and one day for possession of child pornography.

Puskas will also be under 10 years of supervised release when he completes his prison term and must register as a sex offender. Federal Judge John Copenhaver pronounced the sentence, which could have been a maximum of 10 years in prison and lifetime supervision.

In addition, Puskas and the Ripley Police Department have been named as co-defendants in a civil suit filed in U.S. District Court by the woman with whom Puskas allegedly had a long relationship, beginning when she was a teenager.

Katelyn Grace Sleboda, 20, of Roanoke, VA, filed the civil rights suit in U.S. District Court on December 3, claiming Puskas maneuvered her into a relationship while she was underage and used his influence as a Ripley police officer to lure her into a sexual relationship.

Sleboda claims she first met Puskas as a youngster in 2001 when she began attending soccer games where Puskas coached her brother's team.

At age 14, Sleboda alleges Puskas sent her a nude photo of himself, and expressed his desire for a sexual relationship. After sending her more nude photos, she claims Puskas pressured her into sending him nude photos of herself. She alleges the relationship escalated with Puskas taking nude photos of her himself with a police department-issued camera and then downloaded them on his police department computer.

After her 16th birthday, Sleboda claims Puskas checked them into a Ripley motel where they had sex. Sleboda alleges the sexual relationship and nude photo/sexually explicit video sessions continued on a regular basis over the next two years including incidents of him allegedly handcuffing her to the steering wheel of his police cruiser during sexual encounters.

Sleboda also alleges that Puskas threatened to kill her on more than one occasion. She claims she began trying to distance herself from him after her 18th birthday, but that he began to harass her.

Sleboda also claims that her boyfriend lodged a complaint against Puskas for stalking with the Ripley Police Department. No contact or investigation was ever conducted, she alleges.

In 2011, Sleboda said she and her boyfriend moved to Roanoke, VA to get away from Puskas. She claims he came to Roanoke, demanded sexual favors and again threatened to kill them both. Following the incident, Sleboda said her boyfriend again contacted the Ripley Police Department to lodge a complaint against Puskas.

In February, 2012, Puskas ceased attempting to contact her, Sleboda claims.

In May, 2012, Puskas resigned from the Ripley Police Department during a State Police investigation of his relationship with Sleboda.

In January, 2013, Puskas was arrested by federal marshals and charged with possessing, distributing and accepting child pornography. Puskas agreed in July to enter a guilty plea to one count of possession of child pornography.

In her civil rights suit, Sleboda claims she remains "in great fear of retribution" from Puskas. She also claims the Ripley Police Department's failure to do anything when they were informed about his behavior has contributed to her suffering "great and continued permanent psychological/emotional harm." Her lawsuit seeks damages, attorney fees and court costs.



George Michael Puskas II