

Former Woodland Park cop sentenced to five years for attempted assault on girl - NorthJersey.com

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Calling his crimes “horrible” and “mind-boggling” a judge Wednesday sentenced former Woodland Park police officer Steven E. Vigorito, Jr. to five years in prison for attempting to arrange to have sex with a girl whose mother had brought her to police headquarters seeking help.



Former Woodland Park police officer Steven Vigorito Jr. in court for his sentencing Wednesday.

AMY NEWMAN / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Former Woodland Park police officer Steven Vigorito Jr. in court for his sentencing Wednesday.

“They came down to police headquarters seeking help for a problem,” Superior Court Judge Marilyn C. Clark told Vigorito during sentencing in Paterson. “And their problem was only exacerbated. A seventh-grader was seeking assistance. And what you did was horrible and incomprehensible.”

Clark sentenced Vigorito to two five-year sentences to run at the same time, the result of a plea deal in which the former cop pleaded guilty to attempted aggravated

sexual assault and official misconduct. Under the deal, Vigorito is ineligible for parole and must register as a sex offender under Megan’s Law when he is released.

When he gets out of prison, Vigorito can never work in law enforcement again, and he will be subject to parole supervision for life, which severely restricts his movement and prohibits him from having access to the Internet.

Vigorito, 41, did not speak or offer an apology to the victim, now 14, who came to court with her mother and father. The girl did not speak during sentencing, but her mother and father lashed out at the man whose sworn duty as a cop was to protect and serve, but who tried to take advantage of a child through a series of sexually explicit text messages he sent in April 2012.

“What you have done is pathetic and let me tell you why,” the father said. “With a family of little girls of your own, how could you have used your position and abuse and betray the trust of a family in need just to fulfill your heinous, selfish, perverse egregious sickness?”

The father said Vigorito’s actions have created a “rippling effect” that will continue to impact the family.

“Today, you need to look at your family and feel the absolute shame and disgrace you have brought to your family name today and forever,” he said. “Today, we are doing what you swore to do and failed to do. We are serving justice. This community and the world is a safer place without you in it.”

The names of the girl’s parents are being withheld to protect the identity of the victim.

Vigorito stood with his eyes downcast as the girl's mother followed and spoke of betrayal and the pain he has caused.

"Now, I am done suffering," the mother added. "But your suffering shall begin." A little while later she added, "You used your position of power to hurt us."

Despite Vigorito's attempts to seduce the girl, no sex ever took place. The child, after receiving the texts, went to her mother, who went back to the Woodland Park police. The Woodland Park police reported it to the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, which set up an online sting operation that nabbed Vigorito.

Vigorito was originally indicted on charges of attempted aggravated sexual assault, attempted sexual assault and attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted luring, and official misconduct. Had he stood trial and been convicted on all counts, Vigorito faced more than 20 years in prison.

But Senior Assistant Prosecutor Joshua Vazquez said the plea bargain was arranged in part because it spared the child from the trauma of having to testify at a trial, and makes Vigorito subject to parole supervision for life.

"This will follow him for the rest of his life," Vazquez said.

Vigorito, a 12-year veteran of the Woodland Park police department, met the girl after her family brought her to Woodland Park police headquarters in April 2012. The girl had been sneaking out of the house to meet a 17-year-old boy and the parents wanted to make a report. Vigorito took a statement from the girl and knew she was 12 years old at the time.

The police officer gave the girl his phone number during that meeting and told her to call him.

The girl told her mother, who contacted Woodland Park police. Woodland Park police called the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, which set up an online sting operation in which detectives posed as the girl. At one point, Vigorito sent a picture of himself in uniform with his genitals exposed. He was arrested after he sent a text in which he propositioned the "girl" for sex, the state alleged.

Vigorito was being held in the Morris County Jail, but will serve his sentence in a state penitentiary, Vazquez said.

The girl and her family left the courtroom immediately after the sentencing, and paused in the hallway where the father thanked the prosecutor's office for its handling of the case and "for giving us a voice."

The father added that he was proud of his daughter's "bravery and willingness to come forward."

"We urge other victims and their families not to be afraid and to come forward," he said.

Email: cowenr@northjersey.com

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