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# NJ officer accused of luring 12-year-old girl

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PATERSON, N.J. – A New Jersey police officer sent a 12-year-old girl explicit photos of himself in uniform and tried to set up a sexual encounter with her, days after meeting the girl while assisting her family in an unrelated police matter, authorities said Wednesday.

Woodland Park Police Officer Steven Vigorito Jr. pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges ranging from attempted aggravated sexual assault to luring and enticing a child. He was being held on \$250,000 bail following his arrest while on duty Tuesday night. A message left after-hours for the public defender who represented him at the arraignment was not returned.

Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia Valdes said the girl's mother complained to the police department on Monday that the officer had made inappropriate comments to her daughter, had given her his private cellphone number and had asked her to text him. Woodlawn Park Police Chief Anthony Galietti said they immediately contacted the prosecutor's office, whose detectives posed as the girl and started exchanging texts with Vigorito.

The texts became increasingly explicit over the course of several days, prosecutors said. Vigorito eventually texted the girl photographs in which he was exposing himself while wearing his police uniform and arranged to meet her for a sexual encounter, prosecutors alleged.

The girl was never in harm's way, and never exchanged texts with the officer, Valdes said.

"What is so disturbing about this, is the person who was to assist the family, ends up preying on the family," Valdes said.

The 39-year-old Vigorito has been with the police department for 12 years in Woodland Park, a small suburb about 15 miles from Manhattan. The town, known until a recent voter-approved name change as West Paterson, is a bucolic, leafy borough of neatly landscaped homes adjacent to Paterson, a grittier, more industrialized urban neighbor.

Vigorito, who New York television station WABC-7 reported is a married

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father of two, was arrested Tuesday night in the police station while on the night shift, according to Galietti, who said the patrolman was suspended without pay pending the outcome of the investigation.

The arrest of one of the 25 officers on the force has shaken the small department, Galietti said.

"It's very upsetting, when you have one of your own do something like this. It's very upsetting," he said. Galietti added that department officials had acted immediately upon receiving the family's complaint about the officer, and had no hesitation in alerting the prosecutor's office.

"When this came to light we went into it head-on. We didn't care if it was one of our own," he said. "I'm the father of five kids, and this is wrong. It's a very inappropriate situation. Unfortunately, he (Vigorito) had a badge at the time."

Follow Samantha Henry at <http://www.twitter.com/SamanthaHenry>

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