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## Underage sex, gang connections alleged in police officer's arrest

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Police officer John “Johnny” Poland allegedly used his position of power to groom teenage girls for sex and provide sensitive police information to people connected to gang members, according to a criminal complaint filed this week. And when the police officer looked like he might get caught, he told his sexual partners to get rid of the evidence, according to the FBI.

Poland, 44, was arrested at the South Lake Tahoe Police Department about 10 a.m. Wednesday while picking up paperwork, according to Police Chief Brian Uhler.

FBI Agent Chris Campion filed a 12-page criminal complaint against Poland on Tuesday. The complaint charges Poland with five federal counts related to witness tampering and persuading a person to conceal evidence in an official proceeding. The maximum sentence for each count is 20 years in prison.

Poland was aware of a federal investigation into his activities and was on paid administrative leave since November 2011. He was expected to be on unpaid administrative leave starting Thursday, Uhler said.

Poland was booked into the Sacramento County Main Jail Wednesday, according to online booking information. It is unknown whether he has an attorney.

Campion's complaint paints a portrait of a police officer with personal connections to gang members who was a pedophile trying to exploit vulnerable girls for sex.

Much of the criminal complaint centers around Poland's sexual relationship with a woman identified only as “C1.” The woman, who was a girlfriend of a suspected drug trafficker and gang member, told investigators Poland gave her information about police operations on several occasions.

During one such occasion, in June 2011, Poland was recorded making calls on his personal cell phone in a police patrol vehicle, Campion wrote. During one of the conversations, he gave information about upcoming search warrants to people familiar with C1, according to the complaint. One of the searches later turned up a significant amount of methamphetamine.

“In particular, there was one recorded call in which Poland is heard giving detailed notice (location information, target information, agency involvement and suspected violation information) of the pending execution of the warrants,” Campion wrote in the court document. “In the recorded call, Poland admitted that — during the briefing — he withheld and failed to reveal to the agencies conducting the searches and federal investigators his sexual relationship with C1, his familiarity with C1's criminal activity and associates, and his familiarity with C1's residence (one of the search locations.)”

Campion alleges Poland then coached the woman on how to respond if contacted by investigators, encouraging her to delete information from her phone and telling her to say she didn't know about her boyfriend's alleged drug-dealing. Poland would admit to knowing about the drug dealing in one of the recorded conversations documented in the complaint.

The woman, whose age is not included in the document, also told investigators Poland would provide vehicle registration information from police databases to her and her acquaintances. Poland also gave her information on whether a drug dealer had an active warrant out for their arrest, according to the complaint. At one point, investigators observed

Poland in “close association” with gang members at a funeral.

On several occasions, Poland encouraged C1 to destroy evidence included under a grand jury subpoena she had received.

Poland also allegedly gave out internal police information to another woman he had a sexual relationship with, a 23-year-old he met while working as the School Resource Officer at South Tahoe High School. He shared information with her about federal search warrants regarding people she was familiar with and provided her with her own internal police file, according to Campion. The complaint alleges he coached the woman to tell investigators that she did not know about drug trafficking by C1's boyfriend.

Some of the most lurid allegations in the complaint stem from Poland's work at the high school from approximately 2003 to 2006. The complaint alleges Poland had sexual relationships with two underage girls he met while working at the school.

After initially denying a sexual relationship with Poland, one woman, referred to as “Victim 1” in the complaint, told investigators that she engaged in sexual activity with Poland while she was a 17-year-old senior at the high school. Poland was 35 at the time.

The meetings took place at secluded spots Poland chose and happened while Poland was on and off duty, according to the woman's statement. She said she did not have sexual intercourse with him until after her 18th birthday and her graduation from high school.

Poland allegedly signed the girl's yearbook with a message saying he would always be available for a kiss if his wife isn't around.

“I do appreciate your individual time that you give me and look forward to the days (and nights) ahead!”... “You are a special person to me [Victim 1's first name]! I love you (Shhh!) [heart symbol] JP P.S. I don't think you suck in bed!,” according to the criminal complaint's recounting of the message.

Poland also attempted to get the girl to destroy evidence of their relationship when she received a subpoena to provide emails and gifts Poland had given her, according to the complaint.

A second victim told investigators that she had engaged in sexual activity with Poland while she was 17 and in high school.

Poland would regularly give the girl rides to and from school in a police car, get her and her friends out of trouble at school and provide her and her friends with alcohol, according to the complaint. One of the sexual encounters between the two happened while Poland was on duty and in uniform, according to the woman's statements.

Even after the sexual relationship stopped — when she rebuffed Poland's drunken advances in January 2006 — Poland continued signing off on subsequent “fix-it” tickets and running law enforcement computer checks for her, according to the complaint.

The document notes additional former high school students being “unusually close” to Poland while he worked at the high school. They said Poland gave them nicknames, gifts, special attention and appeared to want to have a sex with them, something noted in the report as a characteristic of a pedophile grooming potential victims.

Wednesday's arrest was not the first time Poland has run into legal trouble. Poland was fired from the police department in June 2007 for his alleged cover-up of a 2006 incident where a student brought a BB gun to the high school.

He was reinstated in 2009 after a more than two-year fight for his job that ended up in El Dorado County Superior Court.

In addition to this week's criminal charges, the police department has also launched an administrative investigation into Poland, Uhler said. It is unclear how long the department's investigation will take.

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