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D.A.: Ex-Chesco prison guard to get 'eternity in hell' for child sex abuse

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WEST CHESTER — A former Chester County Prison lieutenant was sentenced to 20 to 40 years in state prison Tuesday after he pleaded guilty to sexually abusing five foster children under his care.

According to the Chester County District Attorney's office, 60-year-old Leroy Mitchell and his wife were foster parents to over 50 children over a decade-long period at their West Bradford home. Authorities said Mitchell also worked as a youth sports coach and was active in his community church.

"The defendant will spend the rest of his life in prison and the rest of eternity in hell," said Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan. "He stole the youth innocence and youth of these children. No punishment is severe enough for this conduct."

Mitchell was arrested last May after a 10-year-old victim reported that she had been sexually assaulted by Mitchell. In a subsequent interview with investigators, officials said, Mitchell admitted to the reported assault and another separate assault of a different child.

According to a criminal complaint filed by investigators, both of the victims were under Mitchell's care when the alleged offenses were committed. The first victim was 9 years old when the assaults occurred, the complaint said.

The complaint describes alleged assaults that occurred on multiple occasions at Mitchell's home and other locations. The second victim was 7 to 9 years old at the time of the alleged assaults against her.

After the interview, members of the Pennsylvania State Police and the Chester County Detectives launched an investigation into Mitchell's past, discovering that he and his wife had fostered over 50 children throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Authorities said investigators tracked down witnesses across the country, discovering and corroborating accounts from other suspected victims. After media reports covered Mitchell's arrest, other victims came forward. Authorities said many victims provided similar stories about Mitchell gaining their trust, then using that trust to commit abuse.

Officials said Mitchell's employment with Chester County Prison was immediately terminated after the initial report and arrest. He was incarcerated at a jail in Montgomery County as a precaution, officials said.

On Tuesday Mitchell pleaded guilty to charges of aggravated indecent assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, indecent assault, corruption of minors, and endangering the welfare of children. Those charges focused on offenses against five children, officials said.

According to authorities, there were numerous other victims who came forward, but their cases were outside of the statute of limitations. Prosecutors credited Mitchell's arrest and sentencing to the courage of the victims who came forward to report the abuse.

"It was the courage of a one 10-year-old girl who started this investigation. These victims came forward, told the hard truth about the defendant, and brought the defendant to justice. The strength of these victims was awe-inspiring," said Assistant District Attorney Deb Ryan, who prosecuted the case.

The main investigators in the case were state trooper David Brodeur and Chester County Detective James Ciliberto. Mitchell was sentenced by Common Pleas Judge David Bortner.

"This is one of the most disturbing child abuse cases in the history of Chester County. The defendant was a wolf in sheep's clothing, using his respectability to gain access to innocent children," Hogan said. "The Pennsylvania State Police and the Chester County Detectives are to be commended for taking this predator out of our community. Nothing is more important than the safety of our children."

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