

## Court filings: LCPD investigator sexually assaulted girl in his car

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LAS CRUCES >> What started as a ride-along with a detective -- an exciting event for a teenage girl who dreamed of police work -- took a dark turn when the girl's supposed mentor sexually assaulted her in his unmarked Las Cruces Police Department car, according to court documents.

Friday night LCPD arrested one of its own, longtime detective Michael Garcia on related charges: criminal sexual penetration, a fourth-degree felony, and second-degree criminal sexual contact. Garcia, 37, of the 5800 block of Megan Street in Santa Teresa, posted a \$20,000 secured bond late Friday, and was released from the Doña Ana County Detention Center.

The girl, whose name is being withheld by the Sun-News due to the nature of the alleged crime, recently told another LCPD detective about the incident, according to a criminal complaint filed Monday in Magistrate Court. The girl told an LCPD investigator she was "falling apart" and that "being a police officer was so important to her and it was taken away from her" in May 2011.

That's when, Garcia reportedly took the girl, then 17 and an Las Cruces Public Schools Excel student, on the ill-fated ride-along. After leaving a scene where somebody had died, Garcia reportedly took her back to her high school. Garcia allegedly drove past the school, then into a nearby neighborhood.

Once they stopped, according

to the complaint, Garcia unzipped each of their pants and fondled her. He forced her hand to his genitals. Later, after she was crying and shaking, he threw her hand away and said, "god damn it," according to the complaint. He seemed to know what happened was wrong, the complaint states.

"You're not going to say anything, right?" Garcia reportedly told the girl, according to the complaint. "I have a wife and kid. This is my life."

Garcia and his wife are divorced.

During an interview with another detective Friday at LCPD headquarters, Garcia reportedly admitted to the assault, according to the complaint. That detective described Garcia as "remorseful."

The student never again went on a ride-along.

Garcia, who specializes in crimes against children cases, has been placed on paid administrative leave. He was also an officer with DARE, a well-known drug education program that places officers in the classroom with students.

The supervisor of LCPD's criminal investigations division, Lt. Kerry Clements, said Monday that no prior complaints had been levied against Garcia.

LCPD chief Richard Williams seemed shaken as he spoke of the case Monday in front of reporters at City Hall.

"It's painful for us," he said. "It hurts our department. It hurts the men and women that go out and protect this city each and every day. ... It's something we would never put up with."

Added Williams: "He will go through the process like anybody else."

Williams and Clements both said the investigation was swift.

"The minute we heard about the allegations, we immediately opened up a criminal investigation," Williams said. "That process worked rather rapidly."

Clements said LCPD consulted the FBI for the case. FBI spokesmen Frank Fisher said his organization is helping with resources and is looking into any possible violations of federal law.

It remains an active investigation, Clements said, and more charges could be coming against Garcia. No other officers have been placed on leave as part of the investigation, Clements said.

LCPD has arranged for counseling for the girl, as they typically do with such victims.

Saturday LCPD spokesman Dan Trujillo said this was the first incident of an officer facing criminal charges during his time with the department, about seven years.

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