

Ex-Las Cruces detective pleads guilty in molestation case

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Michael Garcia

- Apr 17:
- Former LCPD detective pleads guilty in sexual assault case
- Oct 1:
- Grand jury indicts former Las Cruces detective accused of sex crimes
- Sep 4:
- Former Las Cruces detective facing more felony sex charges
- Aug 31:
- Police, school officials stop student ride-alongs in wake of detective arrest
- Aug 30:
- LCPD detective charged with sexually assaulting student has resigned
- Aug 24:
- LCPD detective arrested on sex charge involving teenage girl

LAS CRUCES >> A former Las Cruces Police Department detective pleaded guilty Thursday to molesting a young girl between 2004 and 2009, the second case involving child sex crimes that he has admitted to since April.

Michael Garcia, 38, pleaded guilty in state District Court to five counts of criminal sexual contact of a minor, all second-degree felonies. He faces a minimum 15-year prison term, but won't be sentenced for several weeks.

Last September, a grand jury indicted Garcia on 10 counts of sexually abusing a female relative from the time she was 11 through age 17, court documents state. As part of Thursday's plea agreement, prosecutors dropped five counts, including one first-degree felony that carried a mandatory 18-year sentence.

Police — some Garcia's longtime colleagues — first arrested Garcia last August, in a separate case about two weeks before the molestation allegations came to light. Initially, authorities charged Garcia with a 2011 sexual assault of another teenage girl, who was an Excel student at LCPD, inside his unmarked police car.

He resigned from LCPD at that time. Garcia had been an officer in Las Cruces for 15 years, most recently as a detective specializing in crimes against children.

The first case resulted in state charges and federal charges.

On April 17, Garcia pleaded guilty in federal court to criminal civil rights violations of the teenage Excel student. As part of that plea deal with federal prosecutors, the District Attorney's Office dropped the state case.

In the federal case, Garcia faces nine years in prison. He likely will be sentenced later this summer, defense attorney Mario Esparza said in court Thursday.

Once the federal case is complete, Garcia will be sentenced in 3rd Judicial District Court for the molestation case.

Esparza said he will argue for a concurrent sentence, meaning Garcia would serve the state and federal sentences at the same time.

Garcia remains out on bond, as he has been for about a year. Thursday's proceedings exonerated a previous bond so 3rd Judicial District Chief Judge Fernando Macias set another \$50,000 unsecured bond, one that was not opposed by prosecutor Daniel Sewell.

Esparza said Garcia is also under a federal bond.

Garcia has been living in the El Paso area and was, until recently, working temporary jobs, Esparza said.

There is also a civil case against Garcia pending in federal court, one filed by the family of the Excel student. That lawsuit alleges Garcia has a history of sexual misconduct at LCPD — he had sex with another officer's girlfriend in his police car, the suit states — and that the department failed in handling those previous transgressions.

That case is pending and seeks unspecified actual, compensatory and punitive damages.

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