

Ex-D.C. police officer sentenced to 18 years in prison for child sexual abuse

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A 23-year veteran D.C. police officer was sentenced to 18 years in prison Friday for the sexual assault of a teenage girl who sang in his church choir.

Officer Wendel Palmer, 46, was found guilty of repeatedly sexually assaulting a then-10-year-old girl from 2004 to 2006. The girl, authorities said, sang in the youth choir of the Bethuel Temple Church of Christ Apostolic in Southeast. Palmer was the choir director.

After a D.C. Superior Court trial in November, the jury found Palmer guilty of counts including first- and second-degree child sexual assault. Palmer was dismissed from the police department after he was convicted.

At Palmer's sentencing, Assistant U.S. Attorney Amy Zubrensky told Judge Herbert B. Dixon that Palmer used his positions as a police officer and a choir director to prey upon girls.

Zubrensky added that Palmer was now suspected of sexually assaulting three other girls during the same period but has not been charged in those alleged incidents. Zubrensky said that at times during the incidents, Palmer wore his police uniform and assaulted his victim in the church that was founded by his family.

"He abused his position and his badge. He used his position and badge to gain access to his victims and gain the location," she said.

The now-21-year-old victim, who testified during the trial, told the judge that she was still dealing with the attacks emotionally.

The woman told police about the attacks three years ago, saying she was afraid to tell anyone when the assaults were happening because of Palmer's position with the police and as her choir director.

"I've been through a lot. It's still hard, but I've learned to move on. I have forgiven him, even though he has not apologized," she said.

Palmer, as he did during the trial, denied the allegations. "I maintain my innocence. I did not do this. Your honor, please be as lenient as possible," said Palmer, who has been in D.C. jail since his arrest in January 2013.

Palmer tried to say more, but his attorney, David Benowitz, repeatedly interrupted him by

whispering in his ear.

Benowitz had requested a new trial after a juror e-mailed the judge and said she did not agree with the guilty verdict and said the other jurors bullied her to vote guilty. Dixon denied Benowitz's request.

Prosecutors had asked that Palmer be sentenced to 44 years in prison. Palmer's attorney asked for a two-year sentence, including time served. Dixon ultimately sentenced Palmer to the lower end of the D.C. sentencing guidelines.

"No amount of time would be enough to bring back what my sister had to go through," the victim's brother said after the sentencing.

As he has said at numerous sentencings in the past for other defendants, Dixon pondered one of his frequent musings: "I often wonder why bad things happen to good people," he said, referring to the victim. "And why good people do bad things."