

Averal Burnett sexual assault arraignment

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A former Pine Belt law enforcement officer is scheduled for arraignment on Sept. 8 in 15th District Circuit Court in Purvis on multiple charges including fondling and sexual battery.

Earlier this summer, Averal “Junior” Burnett was indicted by a Lamar County grand jury on seven counts including four of fondling, two of sexual battery and one of attempted sexual battery.

Burnett had appeared before Judge Tony Mozingo on Thursday morning after an earlier arraignment date had been requested. But when Burnett’s lawyer could not appear because of illness, the procedure was moved back to its originally-scheduled date of Sept. 8.

Burnett had been arrested May 31 by the Mississippi Highway Patrol for an alleged sexual battery of a Lamar County female. That charge was later upgraded to rape.

The charges changed again when the grand jury indicted him on multiple sexual acts against a family member under the age of 18.

Burnett, who had spent the bulk of his 22 years in law enforcement with the Hattiesburg Police Department before retiring from the Lamar County Sheriff’s Department after less than a year’s service on May 16, had been held without bond in the Pearl River County jail.

While incarcerated, Burnett was charged in July with two counts of attempted capital murder relating to an alleged murder-for-hire scheme. Burnett was accused of giving money to a former inmate at Pearl River County Jail to kill two people who were tied to the Lamar County case.

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