

Judge clears cop of sex assault of colleague's 9-year-old, orders counseling

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2014 Cop Pedophile Dennis Barnes

A Cook County judge who had cleared a longtime Chicago police sergeant of the sexual assault of a colleague's young daughter, convicting him instead of misdemeanor battery, ordered the cop Wednesday to undergo up to two years of sex offender counseling.

In explaining the unusual move, Judge Charles Burns said prosecutors had failed at trial to prove, as required by law, that Dennis Barnes fondled the girl for his own sexual arousal, yet the judge said he believed "something was going on, and that's something that I find disturbing."

The alleged victim's mother, herself a Chicago police officer who had invited Barnes to her home for the first time for a family barbecue, blasted the judge's decision, saying she felt Barnes had been given preferential treatment because he was a Chicago cop.

"I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe it because of all the evidence," she said, wiping away tears after court Wednesday as she recalled the judge's decision to find Barnes guilty of a lesser, nonsexual offense after a short bench trial in January. "The judge even admitted that it disgusted him, so why would you say it's only a misdemeanor battery?"

The Tribune is not naming the mother or her daughter because of the sexual nature of the allegations. The girl was 9 at the time of the alleged assault in August 2014.

Barnes was charged with felony attempted predatory criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse. The 27-year department veteran resigned from the force three months after he was charged, a police spokesman said.

Barnes apologized Wednesday to the judge but said his actions that day were accidental. His attorney, Michael Clancy, told the judge his client had been drinking for hours that day.

"I'm deeply, deeply regretful," said Barnes, 63. "Whatever it was, was an accident, but I feel sorry for her."

The judge rejected that claim in sentencing Barnes to 60 days in Cook County Jail in addition to placing him on intensive probation intended for sex offenders for two years. In addition to counseling, Barnes will undergo a psychological evaluation to determine if he has pedophile tendencies or other issues.

"I don't believe this was incidental contact," Burns said. "I don't believe it was an accident."

The judge also gave Barnes two weeks before reporting to jail but ordered that he immediately be

placed on electronic monitoring.

Prosecutors alleged that Barnes was "grooming" the girl for the alleged assault after arriving at the family's home, reading a book with her for an hour and letting her play with his cellphone before sitting next to her on the couch as she watched a movie with her brother, then 15.

He massaged her feet, rubbed her legs and then reached into her shorts and attempted to sexually assault her, prosecutors alleged. When her mother entered the room, the girl began crying and told her what had happened.

"(Barnes) told the victim that he was her mother's boss," Assistant State's Attorney Tracy Senica told the judge. "And she testified that she didn't scream because she didn't want to get her mom into trouble."

The mother was outraged that Barnes escaped a sex-related felony conviction, saying she felt any "normal citizen" wouldn't have caught such a break. She also was disappointed with the 60-day sentence.

"I mean I've never heard of anybody being charged with two felony sexual charges and then getting a misdemeanor battery," she said. "I've never heard of that, and I've been doing this job a long time."

After the attack, her outgoing daughter had become withdrawn and continues to struggle with chronic nightmares and bed-wetting, she said.

The girl spent months in counseling "before finally being able to accept the fact that all policemen aren't monsters," her mother told the judge, reading a statement in court. She said she had taken the daughter to her station and that other colleagues had been loving and supportive toward her.

But her daughter no longer aspires to be a Chicago cop when she grows up and doesn't want any officers coming to their home, her mother said outside court.

"I have that desire to help people," the woman said of her own decision to become a police officer. "It's bad when one or two bad officers make us look horrible."

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