

## Former sheriff's deputy enters 'best interest plea'

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2015 Cop Pedophile Tony Allen Behel

RUSSELLVILLE — A former Franklin County sheriff's deputy, indicted on first-degree sexual abuse charges, has pleaded guilty to a lesser offense of harassment, authorities said.

Court officials said Tony Allen Behel, 40, Neighbors Lane, Russellville, entered the plea Wednesday during a presentence hearing.

Behel was indicted in May on the allegations of inappropriate interactions with a teenager, authorities said.

Because Behel is a former law enforcement officer, the case was investigated by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's State Bureau of Investigation.

Franklin County District Attorney Joey Rushing said once the investigation was completed, the case was presented to the grand jury by a member of the Marion County District Attorney's Office.

Rushing said Thursday the plea agreement was reached Wednesday between Behel's attorney, Tim Case, and assistant Marion County District Attorney Page Vick, who was the special prosecutor.

Case said Behel agreed to a "best interest plea" of harassment, a Class C misdemeanor.

He said the agreement was made after being approved by the victim and her family.

Court officials said in accordance with the plea agreement, Behel was sentenced to 90 days, suspended for two years, and he was placed on unsupervised probation for two years.

"We would have gone to trial, but this was what Tony wanted to do," Case said.

He said Behel will not register as a sex offender.

"Tony maintains his innocence that it didn't happen, and he did a best interest plea to get this over with and get it behind him. Now he and his wife and family can move on with their lives."

Reports indicate Behel is accused of inappropriately touching a 15-year-old family acquaintance.

Authorities said the incident occurred in 2014, according to the report. Officials said the girl told a family member, who contacted authorities.

"Tony has dedicated his life to law enforcement and military service, and he is glad to get this

behind him,” Case said.

Franklin County Sheriff Shannon Oliver said Behel, who worked with the department for 10 to 12 years, has not been employed for the last 18 months. He left the department on military medical leave.

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