

Ex-deputy charged with sex crimes won't be 'unfettered'

Kevin Robinson, [pnj.com](#)

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2015 Cop Pedophile Walter Thomas

A former Escambia County Sheriff's deputy facing allegations of sexual battery on a juvenile has been denied a request to work outside the state of Florida.

Walter Thomas is charged with three counts of sexual battery on a victim 16 or 17 years of age. Thomas was a deputy at the time the offense allegedly occurred, but he is no longer employed by the Sheriff's Office.

In a hearing Thursday afternoon before Circuit Judge Ross Goodman, Thomas' attorney, Patrece Cashwell, requested that Thomas be allowed to take a sales position in a company that creates graphic designs for T-shirts.

The position would have required Thomas to spend as much as two weeks at a time traveling largely unsupervised through Florida, Alabama, Texas and other states. Cashwell said that Thomas — who has pleaded not guilty and was released on a \$190,000 bond shortly after his arrest — is not a flight risk. She also said he has limited options for obtaining income.

"His being able to find a job with the nature of the charges and the media attention is difficult," she said. "Him being able to find a job at all is wonderful."

However, Assistant State Attorney Anne Patterson inquired if Thomas had pursued any other employment opportunities. Thomas said he had not.

"The state understands he needs a job, but he's made no reasonable effort to seek a job locally," Patterson told the judge. "...It defies logic that with the nature of these charges he be allowed to travel unfettered through a vast part of the South Eastern United States."

Cashwell said she could work with Thomas' potential employer to decrease the size of his sales territory and establish a verifiable travel schedule, however Goodman denied Thomas' request.

"I'm reticent to try and establish boundaries for a man who could be anywhere in a 1,200 mile radius," he said.

During the hearing, Goodman also granted a pair of evidence-related motions. One allowed the State Attorney's Office to keep Thomas' cellphone in evidence, and the other granted Cashwell permission to seek access to all the contents of an alleged victim's Facebook page. Goodman explained his order does not guarantee Cashwell be given access to the account, and the judge made a stipulation that any info gleaned from the account would only be available to the attorneys.

A tentative jury selection date in the trial was set for Oct. 12.

Another former deputy, Mark Smith, is facing charges of sexual battery against a juvenile in a separate case. Both men allegedly met the juveniles through Douglas and Leah Manning, married paramedics who are also charged with range of child-related sex offenses.

Smith has been released on bond, and both Manning are currently being held without bond.