

Former Hagerman police chief posts \$100K bond

By **Trevier Gonzalez** - October 2, 2017

Court records chronicle the alleged sequence of events that have led to the former Hagerman police chief possibly facing the rest of his natural life behind bars on child molestation charges instead of a livin comfortable retirement on a taxpayer pension, and even possibly running for mayor of Hagerman.



Mason III

According to the criminal complaint filed against Cassius Mason III, he provided a teenage girl in Hagerman with a cellphone for illicit purposes, shared lewd messages with her, and enticed the 15-year-old girl to perform sexual acts on him while he was in his Hagerman Police Department cruiser.

Mason, who retired from law enforcement July 28, is charged with three third-degree felony counts — criminal sexual contact with a minor, causing or permitting child to engage in sexual activity, and child solicitation by electronic communication device. The complaint also states that Mason meets with child.

Mason was arrested Thursday by the Chaves County Sheriff's Office. He was arraigned Friday before Chaves County Magistrate E.J. Fouratt, who set Mason's bond at \$100,000.

In court records, the judge said releasing Mason on non-surety conditions would not reasonably assure his appearance in court because the "case is strong, (he's a

to victim, community, (and) p
official in position of authority.

Mason bonded out of the Chav
Adult Detention Center Monday. His bond conditions required Mason to surrender his passport and
contact with the alleged victim or anyone under 18 years old, unless supervised. Mason was also pl
house arrest, under electronic monitoring

Neither Mason nor his attorney, Ruidoso defense attorney Gary Mitchell, could be reached for comm
Monday. A woman answering the telephone at Mason's residence Monday night said the family was
by the allegations and no one from his family wished to comment.

Mason, nominated in 2013 by Character Counts for an Honoring the Badge ceremony, has yet to er
to the three felony charges. His next court appearance and trial date have not been set.

Criminal complaint

Mason, a former EMT teacher at Hagerman High School, and four other men are charged with the s
exploitation and solicitation of the 15-year-old Hagerman girl.

According to the criminal complaint, the 66-year-old Mason met with the girl during an investigatio
she had made allegations toward three prominent figures within the town of Hagerman.

“(Mason) stated he dispelled all the rumors about the allegations made by (the girl),” wrote Chaves
Sheriff's Office Detective Raul Valderaz.

Doug Perham, a sergeant at the Chaves County Sheriff's Office, spoke with the girl and asked if Ma
mentioned the investigation involving the three Hagerman individuals.

According to the 15-year-old's statement, Mason never told her.

“(We) asked (her) if any of the individuals ... did anything that would cause us concern,” the compla
“She said ‘no,’ the only thing is just formal conversations with them, and she respected all three of

Terrazas

On May 17, Valderaz was assigned to a case involving a teenage girl sending and receiving sexually photographs.

The mother of the teenager, who notified authorities, said her 15-year-old daughter was communicating with 60-year-old Johnny Terrazas.

The mother produced to authorities the cellphone the 15-year-old girl had used. It was not a phone the mother had given her daughter.

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"She stated when she was 14, he contacted her while she was living in Albuquerque," Valderaz wrote. "She stated she started talking to him this year on a fake Facebook account she had."

According to the 15-year-old's statement, after Terrazas would tell her "Hi" via text message, he would tell her a message that he loved her.

"She stated about four days after speaking with him, it became inappropriate," Valderaz wrote. "She stated she started talking inappropriate with him. She stated she had not seen him face to face. She stated she was uncomfortable with the inappropriate text messages. She stated she sent him photographs. She stated the last time she had seen him was about two years prior to them talking."

The teenager also mentioned an instance when Terrazas had once walked in on her while she was in the bathtub, and that he would watch her through a hole in her bedroom door.

Further within the interview, the 15-year-old said there were two occasions when Terrazas tried to touch her when she was sleeping downstairs at a home in Hagerman, when she was 10 years old.

"She stated his hands never went underneath her clothing ...," Valderaz wrote. "(She said he) told an accident."

The 15-year-old m

The girl told inves

riminal complaint

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The 15-year-old girl said she has sent pictures of herself to boys, but Terrazas was the only older in which she has sent photographs.

Mason connection

On July 11, Valderaz applied a search warrant for the 15-year-old's phone after concluding other ac been sexually exploiting her.

After conducting a manual search through the girl's phone, the detective observed a contact with th SA.

There were sexually explicit messages, including a photo, between the 15-year-old and SA, police s

SA instructed the teenage girl to keep the cellphone a secret from others.

The two would continue to exchange sexually explicit messages, including the detailing of each oth fantasies.

After reviewing the messages, authorities said there was enough probable cause to believe the per sending and receiving sexually explicit messages was an adult.

On July 20, a search warrant was granted to Valderaz in order to identify who provided the cellphor girl.

The 15-year-old would later tell authorities she had received one phone from a friend, and another Mason.

A forensic search evaluation was also conducted on Mason's work phone.

After reviewing the extracted data from the former chief of police's phone, a deleted number belonging to a 15-year-old was retrieved.

According to a member of the Hagerman Police Department, the cellphone given to the 15-year-old was Mason's "secret phone."

Valderaz said he did not find any text messages related to the allegations the 15-year-old had raised against other prominent figures in Hagerman.

"All text messages between (the girl) and the defendant were deleted off the phone," the detective wrote. "(We) learned from (her) phone (that Mason) supplied the child with a phone and was sexually communicating via text messages with the child."

The detective said Mason made no mention of supplying the teenager a phone.

On Aug. 23, Valderaz interviewed the 15-year-old. She told authorities she had spoken to Mason a number of times because she was getting sexually harassed at school.

According to the complaint, the juvenile said Mason told her that he bought the cellphone for her.

"He wanted her to keep it because he knew she did not feel safe at home," the detective wrote.

The girl said her relationship with Mason became sexual after he gave her the phone.

Contact

According to the criminal complaint, the 15-year-old said sexual fantasies between herself and Mason went "back and forth."

When asked if she had had any sexual contact with Mason, the girl told police the only thing she had done was touch him.

After asking for clarification, the girl said she would touch Mason's private area while he sat inside the car.

Hagerman Police Department cruiser.

"She stated it (happened) when she would go on walks before school," the detective wrote. "She st (Mason) would drive by and stop to talk to her."

The girl told police she would stand outside Mason's police vehicle, and he would place her hand in area.

"She stated sometimes he was not in uniform and was just going around in his unit," the detective "She stated (Mason) would bring her water or something because he knew she was running."

The teenager said, afterwards, Mason would go about his business. She told authorities Mason never her body.

Warnings

According to an interview with Officer Rachelle Bateman of the Hagerman Police Department on Jul there was "a lot of drama" with the juvenile.

Bateman knew the 15-year-old because she was a school resource officer at the Hagerman school (

"She advised (the girl) is very flirtatious and, in the past, has made several accusations about the s needs kids grabbing (her) breast and butt," the detective wrote.

Mason told authorities that the 15-year-old lives in a "fantasy world" and is "very sexually oriented

Bateman told the detective she would warn all the guys at the school not to be alone with the girl.

Retirement

Bateman said when Mason was still acting police chief, he had been sick and had talked about retiring December 2017. He later told her he was putting in his resignation on July 28.

Mason had also told Bateman he was going to run for mayor.

Valderaz also interviewed Will Norwood of the Hagerman Police Department. Norwood said Mason was a decent boss."

"(Norwood) stated (Mason) handled the investigation wrong," the detective wrote. "(Norwood) stated he never seen him with a female in a vehicle."

Norwood said if he would have seen Mason doing something inappropriate, he would have told him something.

"He had never had a writeup, because he did his job," Norwood told detectives. "Everyone knows (Mason's) reputation."

History

The teen said she had known Mason "her entire life."

"She stated she thinks of Cass like a grandpa – nothing else," the complaint read. "Sgt. Perham asked if she did not find it wrong, she stated she did, but she has always had fantasies about the defendant when he was little."

"(I) concluded (Mason) was encouraging the child to exchange sexually explicit messages about himself and other people and (the 15-year-old) by texting the child sexually explicit content," Valderaz wrote. "In the sexually explicit content of the messages, (Mason) was not investigating anyone (related to the Hagerman allegations,) but encouraging the child not to get caught with the cellphone he provided and to delete the messages between the child and the defendant."

Editor Jeff Tucker contributed to this report.

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