

# L.A. County sheriff's sex crimes investigator arrested on suspicion of raping minor

A Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy assigned to handle sensitive sex abuse crimes, often involving vulnerable minors, has been arrested on suspicion of raping a 14-year-old girl in a case he was investigating.

Neil Kimball was taken into custody Friday evening after a monthlong inquiry into the allegations by the sheriff's criminal internal investigation bureau. He was booked on suspicion of rape by force and preventing or dissuading a victim from testifying.

The 45-year-old investigator with the special victims unit met the girl during the "scope of his work," a department spokeswoman said Monday.

Kimball, a 20-year department veteran, has investigated dozens of child molestation cases in Los Angeles County as a member of the elite specialized unit since 2013.

"The investigation and arrest resulted from information provided to the department by a member of the public," the Sheriff's Department said in a statement. It did not announce the arrest Friday and provided the statement after an inquiry by The Times.

Kimball was investigated previously, after a woman told the Sheriff's Department in February 2009 that Kimball had grabbed her hand several months earlier and tried to make her touch his genitals, according to a memo from the Los Angeles County district attorney's office. Prosecutors ultimately declined to charge Kimball in the case.

Addressing questions about why Kimball was selected to join the Special Victims Bureau despite the 2009 investigation, the department said in a statement:

"The prior allegations involving Det. Kimball were presented to the Los Angeles County district attorney's office and criminal charges were declined due to insufficient evidence. The department will conduct a review of the internal process related to Det. Kimball's assignment at Special Victims Bureau."

The statement also said that a review of Kimball's prior cases to ensure that there are no additional victims is underway.

Officials said the department has not reached out to prosecutors because there are no pending cases or allegations.

News of the arrest sent a tremor through the ranks of sex crime investigators, who are normally thoroughly vetted before receiving such assignments.

Dan Scott, a retired Sheriff's Department sergeant in the special victims unit who has investigated hundreds of child sex abuse cases, said of Friday's arrest: "This is a shock. The unit has never had something like this happen."

The alleged attack occurred in November 2017 in Ventura County, said Ventura County Chief Assistant Dist. Atty. Michael Schwartz, whose office has been involved in the case for the last month. L.A. County sheriff's internal criminal affairs investigators reached out to the Ventura County office for assistance, officials said.

Kimball was relieved of duty with pay and was booked at the Los Angeles County Inmate Reception Center shortly after 11 p.m. Friday. His bail is set

at \$2 million.

Kimball has been away from the unit since August at a medical facility, said Sheriff's Department spokeswoman Nicole Nishida. Kimball was at the facility when the allegation was reported Oct. 10. A colleague at the special victims unit who took over some of his criminal investigations and contacted some of those involved learned of the accusation against Kimball, Nishida said.

"The internal criminal investigation bureau aggressively investigated the case and got a removal order for him from the facility on Friday and that is when he was arrested," Nishida said.

Citing confidentiality laws, Nishida said she could not provide details of the type of medical facility.

Efforts to reach a representative for Kimball were unsuccessful.

Ron Hernandez, president of the Assn. for Los Angeles Deputy Sheriffs, said his group had not been contacted by Kimball for representation.

"Any time I hear allegations of law enforcement crossing the line of their authority and trust it's appalling, but I try to reserve my judgment until I know more details," Hernandez said

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In the 2009 allegation, a woman and her friends were stopped by Kimball and another deputy in the parking lot of a hotel where the group was staying in August 2008, according to the memo by Deputy Dist. Atty. Deborah Escobar.

While the group of friends was being questioned by Kimball, some of the

women in the group asked to use the bathroom in their hotel room, and Kimball allowed it. The deputy followed them to their room, near where the woman who later complained started filling up a Jacuzzi, according to the memo.

The woman said Kimball told her and her female friends to get into the hot tub, and some of them complied, wearing their underwear, as Kimball flirted with them, the memo said.

When Kimball used the bathroom in the group's hotel room, the complainant went to check on him, and found the deputy exposing himself, according to the memo by Escobar. The woman said Kimball took her hand and placed it on his genitals and grabbed her buttocks, but she pulled away.

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Prosecutors declined to file a charge of sexual battery against Kimball, finding no corroborating evidence of the woman's complaint. The witnesses in the hotel gave contradictory statements and the complainant failed to cooperate with investigators, Escobar wrote.

Scott said any prior allegations of sexual misconduct would normally exclude a person from the special victims unit.

"An investigation like this requires [that] you interview all the prior victims he came into contact with during his time there," said Scott, who has served as a consultant on federal and county child abuse commissions. "You have to be very careful with the vetting for this unit because they come into contact with vulnerable victims."

*Times staff writer Matt Hamilton contributed to this report.*

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## UPDATES:

**8:35 p.m.:** This article was updated with additional statements from the department and a deputies' union official.

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**3:30 p.m.:** This article was updated with comments from a sheriff's spokeswoman

**2:10 p.m.:** This article was updated with comments from a retired sheriff's sergeant.

**1:15 p.m.:** This article was updated with information about a previous investigation.

*This article was originally published at 12:25 p.m.*

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