

He was accused of savagely beating an inmate. Now he's been charged with child molestation

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A Miami Herald I-Team investigation into corruption, sexual abuse and medical neglect at the largest women's prison in the nation, Lowell Correctional. Reporting by Julie K. Brown / jbrown@miamiherald.com. By Emily Michot

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A Miami Herald I-Team investigation into corruption, sexual abuse and medical neglect at the largest women's prison in the nation, Lowell Correctional. Reporting by Julie K. Brown / jbrown@miamiherald.com. By Emily Michot

A Florida prison corrections officer accused of brutally beating a female inmate — leaving her paralyzed from the neck down — was arrested Wednesday on charges of an entirely different nature: sexual battery and child molestation.

The Marion County Sheriff's Office Wednesday arrested Keith Turner, 34, a lieutenant at Lowell Correctional Institution, one of the largest women's prisons in the United States and the largest in Florida. It is already the subject of a federal investigation for, among other things, persistent reports of sexual abuse by female inmates by male officers.

In August, the sheriff's office learned of a juvenile who reported the alleged abuse by the lieutenant in a letter to a family member, according to a [statement](#) from the sheriff posted on Facebook. Detectives opened an investigation.

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The accuser said Turner began abusing her when she was 6, and that the abuse occurred on almost a nightly basis for a decade until she was 16.



Raped and impregnated by a corrections officer, Florida inmate says she is the victim of continued abuse behind bars

Florida inmate, Anquanette Woodall, was raped and impregnated by a corrections officer at the Gadsden Correctional Facility in 2016. The officer was arrested and charged with rape. Woodall says that she faces continued harassment and abuse in prison. By [Emily Michot](#)

During the course of the investigation, detectives discovered another juvenile who alleged that Turner sexually abused her as well.

During the period of time in which the alleged abuse occurred, Turner continued to rise through the ranks at Lowell.



State Rep. Dianne Hart talks about conditions at Lowell Correctional Institution

State Representative Dianne Hart discusses the conditions and inmate treatment she found after spending Sunday at Lowell Correctional Institution. By State Representative Dianne Hart

Turner was promoted from officer to sergeant to lieutenant despite a slew of accusations of misconduct, including harassing, kissing and groping inmates and dousing them with noxious chemicals, the Miami Herald [previously reported](#). A former inmate reported he repeatedly engaged in sex acts with inmates, and that he was known to swap cigarettes for sex.

More recently, Turner was linked to a [savage attack on a handcuffed inmate](#), Cheryl Weimar, by a small group of guards. She was slammed to the ground and dragged across the prison yard, witnesses said. The attack on Aug. 21 left the 51-year-old woman, who suffers from mental illness, paralyzed.

Turner remained on the job, although the Department of Corrections says he was kept away from inmates.



Cheryl Weimar was severely beaten by multiple officers at Lowell Correctional Institution, leaving her paralyzed from the neck down. The Department of Corrections is seeking her early release from prison, which would relieve prison health officials of the responsibility of caring for her.

The Department of Corrections issued the following statement from Secretary Mark Inch: "The sheriff's findings in this case against Mr. Turner are abhorrent and in complete contrast to the values and integrity held by our staff. We are moving forward with his immediate dismissal."

Ryan Andrews, attorney for Weimar, said the department's response continues to be inadequate.

"I'm not even sure these allegations will result in his termination from the Department of Corrections," he said. "The fact that DOC is proud they have now fired this guy, they can save it. The fact that now they have some moral rectitude about needing to dismiss Turner is disgusting in light of the prior

accusations against him for which they did nothing, including their inspector general, Lester Fernandez."

State Rep. Dianne Hart, a Democrat from Tampa who has monitored conditions at Lowell closely, applauded the arrest of Turner by the Marion sheriff but said she is "disgusted" that he has retained his job for a decade despite a long string of complaints, stretching back years, alleging abusive treatment of inmates.

Hart said she visited Weimar over the weekend. "She talked about how she forgives her attackers for what they had done to her," the lawmaker recalled.

The sheriff's office says there may be more molestation victims.

Turner is being held without bond at the Marion County Jail.

The Miami Herald's Romy Ellenbogen and Tallahassee bureau chief Mary Ellen Klas contributed to this report.



Keith Turner *Marion County Sheriff's Office*