

'Bully with a badge' sentenced to prison

By Amy Leigh Womack awomack@macon.com

After one woman accused then-Bibb County sheriff's deputy Jeffery Brian Prestridge of physical abuse, several more came forward. The women were afraid, even after Prestridge was locked up, that he'd hurt them or their loved ones, prosecutor Nancy Scott Malcor said at a Wednesday court hearing where Prestridge pleaded guilty to the abuse. Beau Cabell Malcor said most of the women Prestridge dated between 2013 and 2015 didn't know each other. The allegations each of the women brought forward were similar. They described being choked in an arm hold, struck, kicked and having their lives threatened. Prestridge, 35, was hired by the former Macon Police Department in 2013 after being medically discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps due to a blood clotting disorder. He became a Bibb County deputy after the police department and sheriff's office merged in 2014. He was fired on the same day he was arrested in February 2016 after being found in violation of sheriff's office policies. You're about to find out more about bullies than you ever bargained for. Bibb County Superior Court Judge Howard Simms to Prestridge Wednesday, he pleaded guilty to aggravated battery, aggravated assault, family violence-related aggravated assault, two counts of terroristic threats and two counts of cruelty to children. Malcor described him as "the worst kind of bully because he hid behind a badge" while telling one of the women not to report him after he broke one of her ribs and choked her, saying no one would believe her because he was a deputy. He threatened to shoot up the house of another girlfriend while she and her child were inside and to arrest her if he saw her driving alone, Malcor said. Because of his training, "he should have known better," Malcor said. In sentencing Prestridge to 20 years, half of them in prison, Bibb County Superior Court Judge Howard Simms also called Prestridge a "bully with a badge." "You were supposed to be the guy that got between (the abused women) and somebody like you," the judge said. "You weren't supposed to be the one hitting, choking, kicking and threatening these women. "You're about to find out more about bullies than you ever bargained for," he said. Seeking forgiveness Malcor said additional women have come forward with allegations of abuse, but the incidents occurred too long ago for the cases to be prosecuted. If the case had gone to trial, they would have testified. The child cruelty charges stem from Prestridge hitting and kicking the then-6- and 8-year-old sons of one of the women. Ashley Deadwyler, Prestridge's lawyer, argued that her client shouldn't be defined by the dark part of his life. After being discharged from the military, Prestridge sought out a law enforcement career to help people and helped many people through his job as a deputy, she said. After saving a fellow deputy's life, he was allowed to join the sheriff's office's honor guard, Deadwyler said. Prestridge was abused as a child and wasn't able to come forward to report the abuse until he was a teenager, she said. One day I hope they will forgive me. Prestridge said, apologizing to his victims Deadwyler asked Simms to sentence Prestridge to a more lenient five-year sentence, saying his life has already been destroyed. In jail, he's gained 60 pounds while living in nearly solitary confinement for about 10 months. He's at risk of losing his home, she said. Prestridge's aunt and a female friend said they didn't see the violent side of him and asked for leniency. Speaking on his own behalf, Prestridge read aloud from a statement he'd written. He said he's a "broken man" with a conscience that tears at him. He offered apologies to his former girlfriends, saying, "One day I hope they will forgive me." Prestridge also apologized to the Bibb County Sheriff's Office and to local residents, saying he hopes other deputies won't be judged by his conduct. He said he wants the help he needs to control his anger. After he's released from prison, Prestridge must complete a family violence intervention program. Before ending the hearing, Simms said, "We're lucky we're not here talking about somebody being dead." Speaking after the hearing, District Attorney David Cooke said Prestridge violated a "sacred oath" when he abused the women and children. "Any law enforcement officer who does that should expect to go to prison for a long time," he said. Amy Leigh Womack: 478-744-4398 , [@awomackmacon](https://twitter.com/awomackmacon)

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2016 Cop Domestic Violence Jeffery Brian Prestridge