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Letter from ex-Palm Beach police chief: Learn lessons from Epstein case

Michael Reiter Special to the Daily News

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In 2005, early in our investigation, the Palm Beach Police Department recognized the importance of stopping Jeffrey Epstein and bringing him to justice. The department never bent to the power and influence brought to bear against us. Unfortunately, of the many other agencies involved, only the FBI acted in a similar way.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in the Southern District of New York should be congratulated for having the courage to bring Epstein and now Ghislaine Maxwell to justice, something that should have been done in the Florida case 15 years ago.

The importance of the failure of the Florida case cannot be overstated. The United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit began its opinion concerning the rights of Epstein's victims by stating: "The facts underlying this case, as we understand them, are beyond scandalous – they tell a tale of national disgrace."

Now that the courts have spoken, I hope and pray that the professionals in our justice system learn from this case. Law school professors should teach this case in legal ethics courses as examples of how not to treat victims of sex crimes and as a forewarning to prosecutors on how they can be influenced to fail in their duties to both victims and the public.

Even though a child cannot legally consent to sex with an adult, Florida prosecutors charged Epstein with procuring a child for prostitution, which served to label the victims as prostitutes and minimized the seriousness of the crimes against the children. Even the FBI classified their investigation of Epstein as "Child Prostitution." The use of the term "child prostitution" should be banished from our laws and our lexicon.

Finally, this case is a lesson in what can happen when good people look the other way and pretend that they do not see something they know is wrong and dangerous. After Epstein's arrest in 2006, there were many people who told the Palm Beach Police Department that they

observed Epstein with female children in suspicious circumstances, yet they did not report it at the time even though systems were in place to do so anonymously.

Effective protection of society's most vulnerable requires the public to notify law enforcement when suspected criminal activity is observed and for law enforcement to fully investigate the reported information. It is equally incumbent that prosecutors act responsibly in prosecuting where appropriate. Failure of law enforcement and prosecutors to do so without regard to the power, wealth or influence of the suspect is a violation of their oath of office and moral responsibility.

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