

Ex-Police Chief Who Sexually Assaulted 17-Year-Old Gets 25 Years in Prison

Larry Allen Clay Jr., 58, of Fayetteville, W.Va., was also a sheriff's deputy at the time of the crimes, which he tried to cover up, prosecutors said.

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By **Alexandra E. Petri**

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A former police chief in West Virginia was sentenced to 25 years in prison on Thursday for paying a woman \$100 to twice sexually assault her 17-year-old stepdaughter and then trying to cover it up, federal prosecutors said.

The man, Larry A. Clay Jr., 58, of Fayetteville, W.Va., was chief of the Gauley Bridge Police Department and a deputy with the Fayette County Sheriff's Department when he forced himself on the girl in June 2020, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of West Virginia.

Federal prosecutors had recommended a life sentence for Mr. Clay, calling his crimes "one of the most egregious" that can be committed, according to a sentencing memorandum.

William S. Thompson, the U.S. attorney for the district, said in a statement on Thursday that the sentence "reflects the incalculable harm" Mr. Clay caused.

"He failed his oath to protect the public and uphold the law," Mr. Thompson said. "But Clay also failed to anticipate his victim's courage. Despite everything she endured, she came forward. Because of this survivor's bravery and resolve, he was

brought to justice.”

The Washington Post, which last month published an investigation on the case, reported that Mr. Clay called himself “an innocent man” in a brief statement at sentencing.

In handing down the sentence, Judge Joseph R. Goodwin of United States District Court in Charleston, W.Va., told Mr. Clay that “the police are entrusted to serve and protect,” according to The Post.

“To protect liberty, we must hold public servants accountable,” Judge Goodwin said. “Justice demands that those entrusted with power embody the values they are sworn to uphold.”

As part of his sentence, Mr. Clay will be on supervised release for 10 years after his prison term and must register as a sex offender and pay \$80,000 restitution to the victim.

Timothy LaFon, a lawyer for Mr. Clay, did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Thursday.

In April 2023, a federal jury found Mr. Clay guilty of conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking of a minor via coercion, sex trafficking of a minor via coercion and two counts of obstruction of justice after a four-day trial. Mr. Clay was originally to be sentenced in the late summer of 2023, but he successfully petitioned to have it delayed repeatedly.

According to court documents, Mr. Clay paid Kristen Naylor-Legg, the girl's stepmother, \$100 to sexually assault the girl. At the time, the girl's family was struggling to pay their bills and Mr. Clay exploited the situation, The Post reported in its investigation. Mr. Clay wore his Gauley Bridge Police Department uniform, badge, duty belt and service firearm when he assaulted the girl, prosecutors said. “Both times he ensured that the victim was keenly aware of her utter inability to refuse him,” the government said in its sentencing memo.

The first assault took place in an isolated, wooded area “at or near” Mr. Clay’s Police Department-issued vehicle, prosecutors said. The second assault occurred in a basement office of the Gauley Bridge Police Department “in the shadow of the large police emblem painted on the wall,” according to a sentencing memo from prosecutors.

The teenager reported Mr. Clay to the Sheriff’s Department where he served as a deputy, prosecutors said. Investigators retrieved DNA evidence from a washcloth discarded in the office.

Mr. Clay also tried to obstruct the investigation, prosecutors said, first by directing Ms. Naylor-Legg to lie to the police, and then repeatedly urging a former Sheriff’s Department colleague to make the “whole case go away.”

Ms. Naylor-Legg, 31, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to engage in sex trafficking of a minor and testified against Mr. Clay. She was sentenced in August 2023 to nine years in prison.