

Comparatively light sentence still no bed of roses

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TAYLORVILLE-A former Edinburg man was sentenced to 180 days electronic home confinement and four years probation Tuesday afternoon following a negotiated guilty plea in February to aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a child.

Judge Ron Spears also ordered Stephen D. Peel, who now resides in Sangamon County, to register as a sex offender for life and comply with all the stipulations of the Sex Offender Registration Act.

Spears further ordered Peel to comply with the recommendations listed in a court-ordered sex offender evaluation.

At that point, State's Attorney Appellate Prosecutor Michael Vujovich asked Spears about the enforcement of an evaluation recommendation that Peel not enter into a relationship with a woman with minor children. Vujovich told the court it was his understanding that Peel was dating or living with a woman with two minor children.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Spears said he had just sentenced another man in a similar case to 60 years in prison, which he termed "just about right" in such a case. The main difference, the judge said, was that in Peel's case, the victim did not want to testify.

"I was very close to rejecting this plea. You never want to be in front of me, or any judge, on a violation in this case.

"Any break there is, you've had."

Following the hearing, Vujovich said he had dropped four charges of predatory criminal sexual assault filed in 2006 because, as the judge had pointed out, the victim did not want to testify.

However, Vujovich said, life as a sexual offender is not a bed of roses.

"He is under the court's jurisdiction, and he will have to successfully complete about three years

of sex offender treatment, which he has to pay for.

"He can't use alcohol or drugs, and he is subject to testing by the probation department. He can't have unsupervised contact with anyone under 18 years old without permission."

Peel will also have to undergo and pay for regular polygraph tests to verify he is complying with treatment and probation terms.

Vujovich also pointed out that Peel was ordered to pay \$11,143.25 in costs and fines.

A prosecutor walks a fine line, Vujovich said, between prosecuting to the fullest extent of the law or accepting an agreement to protect the victim's recovery.

Peel was defended by attorney Monroe McWard and co-counsel Mark Wycoff. On Wednesday morning, McWard said that they were very satisfied with the procedure and the way the case was handled.

"The evidence, we did not think, was that strong. Based on the facts and evidence, the final outcome was fair, considering that our client, had he gone to trial and lost, could have been sentenced to a maximum 120 years.

"A probation sentence was a tremendous outcome for our client."

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