



CHRISTIAN COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DATE: December 28, 2021

RE: JAMES NORMAN HARPER SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT IN CHILD MOLESTATION CASE, JUDGE SETS MINIMUM TERM BEFORE ELIGIBLE FOR PAROLE AT 300 YEARS

OZARK, MO – Christian County Prosecuting Attorney Amy Fite announces that on December 22, 2021, James Norman Harper was sentenced to life imprisonment for the child molestation of a five-year-old child.

On August 11, 2021, James Norman Harper (40) was found guilty of child molestation in the second degree by a Christian County jury. At trial, the defendant's neighbor testified that she was babysitting the defendant's five-year-old stepson when she observed the child sexually acting out. The child later disclosed to the neighbor, "Daddy does this to me" and "I don't like it." The neighbor later made a hotline call. In response to that hotline call, the Division of Children's Services and the Christian County Sheriff's Office responded to investigate. The child was forensically interviewed the following day at the Child Advocacy Center in Springfield, Mo.

Before the sentencing hearing, the Honorable Judge Laura Johnson found the defendant to be a predatory sex offender under Missouri Revised Statute 566.125. Under this statute, a person with certain prior convictions for sexual offenses can become eligible for an extended term of imprisonment. Judge Johnson found that the defendant had a previous felony conviction for child molestation in the first degree for a 1998 offense involving another five-year-old child. Based on this prior conviction and his current finding of guilt by a Christian County jury, as a predatory sexual offender the defendant was sentenced to a life sentence as required by 566.125 RSMo.

Additionally, per 566.125 RSMo the minimum term a defendant must serve prior to becoming eligible for parole consideration is set by the sentencing judge. Per this statute, based on defendant's conviction, a judge may set this at any term of years not less than 15 years.

The Honorable Judge Johnson sentenced the defendant to serve a life sentence in the Missouri Department of Corrections and set the minimum sentence he must serve before becoming eligible for parole consideration at three hundred years (300) for child molestation second degree.

Identifying and successfully prosecuting child abuse and sexual offenses against children requires citizens to report any child's suspected sexual or physical abuse. If you suspect child abuse or neglect, please call the Missouri Child Abuse & Neglect Hotline at 1-800-392-3738.

The case was prosecuted by Christian County Senior Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Shana Mora and First Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Kristen Tuohy. The rest of the team assigned to this case included Cathryn Ables, Victim Advocate, and Suzanne Frakes, Legal Assistant. The Christian County Sheriff's Office investigated the crime. Sarah Spurlock was the lead investigator assigned to the case. The Christian County Sheriff's Office was assisted by Detective Jason Marcum from the Springfield Police Department.

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