



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



MICHAEL L. RAMSEY
District Attorney

MARK MURPHY
Chief Deputy District Attorney

JASON WINES
Chief Investigator

PRESS RELEASE

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Chico Teacher Sentenced for Child Molest

A former Chico teacher was sentenced to five years in state prison today after pleading no contest to sexual offenses involving a former student. Two of the counts related to crimes committed when the victim was under 16, and two related to crimes committed when the victim was under 18.

Jenifer Lynn Smith, 50, who was a Spanish teacher at Bidwell Junior High School, began an abusive sexual relationship with one of her students at about the time of the young girl turned 14 in 2010. The abuse continued until after the victim turned 18. The victim came forward and reported the abuse to police in 2020.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the now young woman revealed Smith began paying extra attention to her after the victim confided to Smith that she had a turbulent home life. Smith then began spending time with the victim outside of school hours by including her in Smith's own family outings. The victim ultimately moved in with Smith's family, and Smith described the victim to friends and associates as her daughter, despite regularly providing the victim marijuana and alcohol while molesting her.

Ramsey said at today's sentencing hearing, the victim addressed the court and described her years of abuse, and told of the emotional pain she still feels as a result of what Smith did to her. The victim further thanked the people who came to support her in the courtroom, including another alleged victim who claimed Smith attempted to groom her for sexual abuse several years before Smith met the current victim.

Superior Court Judge Michael Deems denied Smith's request for probation and sentenced Smith to the maximum term under the charges Smith plead to, and she was remanded from the courtroom to begin serving her five-year prison term.

"Teachers in our community are trusted with our most precious things – our children. Teachers who violate that trust by sexually abusing their students do great harm to their victims and their community at large," said Ramsey. "We owe a debt of great gratitude to this brave young lady who came forward and shared her story with us. Her courage allowed us to take a dangerous predator off the streets."

Documents filed with the court stated Smith had been on mandatory leave from her teaching position since her arrest and that she is expected to resign from her job and surrender her teaching credential in the face of certain action by the California Board of Education.

Smith will be required to register as a sex offender after prison for a minimum of 20 years.

