Victim: Indecent proposition from New London chief was 'chilling'

Speaking publicly for the first time, Janelle Westfall said state laws failed her after New London's former police chief made her a proposition: If she posed nude for him, the underage alcohol charges against her would be dropped. Because of Westfall's complaint, David Seastrand will never be allowed to serve as a police officer again. She also received a $70,000 settlement from the town. But, she adds, "It just bothers me that it happened, and that they couldn't prosecute (Seastrand). It bothers me that it could happen again to someone else."

Because of Westfall's complaint, David Seastrand will never be allowed to serve as a police officer again. She also received a $70,000 settlement from the town.

But as she sat down with her father and lawyer on Friday to begin a push for new legislation to improve state laws, it was clear that she's still deeply troubled. Asked for her feelings, she began to cry, then paused.
“Scared," Westfall said. "It just bothers me that it happened, and that they couldn't prosecute (Seastrand). It bothers me that it could happen again to someone else."

She paused again. "I'm sad and scared to drive through (New London), that there are going to be people who know who I am and think I'm a bad person. I miss my friends, but I can't go back there, it's all really uncomfortable."

Westfall did not return to college in 2013 and hasn't in 2014, and said she isn't sure when she will be able to return. "I haven't thought of it," she said. "I haven't been able to focus lately."

"She's been very brave," said her father, Todd Westfall of Bridgewater, "but she's been an emotional wreck."

Westfall, who was 18 at the time, was arrested by Seastrand, then 50, on March 2, 2013, as she walked home from a party. She was charged with giving a false name and for being in possession of a beer can.

Four days later, Seastrand called her to the police station. The former chief told Westfall he needed to meet with her alone, and began discussing alternative measures of punishment, like community service, for the misdemeanors.

Westfall, who worked frequently as a babysitter, and who was planning to major in early childhood education, said she grew more scared.

Seastrand explained, she said, that they would go into the basement. "He said would grab the station's camera to shoot a series of nude photos of me, and then he'd hold it over my head for two years to be sure I didn't commit another crime," Westfall said.

"That's when it was really chilling," she said. "He's standing there in uniform, he had his gun strapped on his side."

Seastrand told her he would deny the whole incident if she told anyone. She asked him to call her father, and she left the police station. She then called a friend, as well as her uncle and aunt, who are both police officers. They told her to write down everything she remembered. Her father, meanwhile, called state police.

Seastrand, who was not reachable for comment, and whose lawyer did not return calls asking for comment, resigned on April 4, 2013, surrendering his certification as a police officer after serving for 27 years.

State prosecutors, while calling Seastrand's actions "abhorrent behavior and unacceptable behavior for anyone in that type of a position," did not file criminal charges against him.

They later explained that the only law applicable to the case was the abuse of power statute, under which a public official is guilty of a misdemeanor if he or she knowingly commits an unauthorized act "which purports to be an act of his office" or "knowingly refrains from performing a duty imposed on him by law or clearly inherent in the nature of his office."

The decision was explained to Westfall, but she didn't like it.
"I was hurt, I was hoping for more than that," she said. "I was ready to testify in court, though the thought of that freaked me out, even being in the same room with him again would creep me out."

Westfall and her attorney, Richard Lehmann, say two things need to be changed by the legislature: the language of the law needs to be rewritten so prosecutors can more easily prosecute police in a case like this, and the penalty of the crime "has to be more than a misdemeanor," Westfall said. It would also be good if all police were required to have on-body video cameras, she said.

Westfall said she is willing to lend her experiences and testimony to the new language or for a new law or set of laws. Now, she just needs one or more Granite State legislators to take the lead and come up with the needed legislation.

"We're not trying to be anti-cop, we have cops in the family," Todd Westfall said. "It's just that the difference in power and prestige is so deep, a chief is going to be believed in a case like this and a young person may not be. There has to be an improvement somehow in this system."

"It has to be tough for a young person," Lehmann said. "As a child, we're told that if anything is wrong, you should go find a police officer. It kind of shatters that image."

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Greg Barrett said:

it took many years to bring the Catholic Church to justice. The time has come for each of us to take out our smart phones and video tape every police action possible. The Police should not be above the law. The police should not be allowed to investigate themselves. The Police should not be shuffled from one community to another without consequence. Secret grand juries should not be the procedure used to adjudicate public officials. The time has come for brave public officials like Mayor Deblasio to stand up and not back down. It's the Catholic Church scandals all over again. This time on the taxpayers dime.

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 1:37 am

Gary Gahan said:

More reason for police to be required to be wearing body cameras at all times to protect themselves from false charges aswell as to protect the public from any abuse of power or unlawful restraint. With all that has happened that is coming to light as of late one can only hope that we don't end up making police powerless on the other hand out of fear that every police interaction that an officer might have with the public could be the end of his/her career. Also body camaras would be most helpful in catching perps who are engaging with police officers with the intent of bodily harm or death to the officer. If an officer is taken down or even killed the video would be most helpful. As the saying goes a "picture is worth a thousand words".....videos do not lie and the public should not be restricted from using their video cameras during any police interaction where it will not be obstructing in any way.

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 7:06 am

Steve Johnson said:


(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 7:30 am

stuart urie said:

Congratulations Janelle Westfall. Had I not had the do-nothing (much worse actually) John Kacavas as my first "defense" lawyer in my case, things may have gone differently for me as well..anyway..best of luck to you!!!!!!

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 7:48 am

DUANE RILEY said:

Low life state`s attorney office letting this criminal deviant off the hook ! Another kiss on the lips deal for a fellow public hack ! Town is on the hook for 70 K, he gets to retire with all his town paid bennies and salary !!! Boy the state attorney sure made an example out of him. GRRRRRRR ! If this was a civilian I can GD guarantee this same so called prosecutor would have put the screws to anyone else !

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 8:58 am

Russell Mutch said:

Did the chief know that posing nude is a potential gateway to a life of pornography and prostitution? No young adult should be forced into doing that stuff. Are these police just interfering with my life, or are they trying to kill me?

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 11:42 am

NORMAND GAGNON said:

In NH AG is APPOINTED by the Democrat machine (disguised as the Gov) with a nod to kissing union a$$es, remember the "deal" they put forth for cop union member Coco

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 3:26 pm

ROBERT PAULDING said:

Good for her. So very disappointed in the system and agree 100% with Gary regarding body camera's. What really bothers me is why there wasn't a policy that would've had a female present with her when questioned. Seams like common sense so these things wouldn't happen???

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 5:34 pm

PAUL LUNDWALL said:

Seastrand is a disgusting pervert. Woop-dee-do on an 18 year old carrying a beer can.

(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 5:36 pm
ROBERT PAULDING said:

Paul, on point! Seems like a predator has been put to rest!
(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 6:17 pm

W. Charles Little said:

All I would say to this young woman is to remember that most cops have higher personal morals, as do most people in general.
(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 7:33 pm

Alkis Nakos said:

Last time I checked NH has other schools.
(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 9:07 pm

John Shades said:

NH state prosecutors should be ashamed for letting Seastrand go free. There needs to be more separation between prosecutorial responsibilities and law enforcement to ensure impartiality. At the least a civilian review board would go a long way in gaining the public's trust with regards to cases involving LE.
(Report Abuse) December 28, 2014 10:27 pm

Dean Frazier said:

John Shades, prosecutors can only charge people with crimes that are on the books. Like Westfall's attorney stated, the legislature needs to change the language and the severity of the type of offense that the dirt bag, Seastrand, committed. A civilian review board isn't a bad idea, but they too can't go beyond the laws on the books.
(Report Abuse) December 29, 2014 8:48 am

Steve Johnson said:

@Dean Frazier, I disagree with their favorable interpretation of the wording of that law, to wit, "knowingly refrains from performing a duty imposed on him by law or clearly inherent in the nature of his office." I would think that one inherent duty of the chief of police would be not to do something that most people would consider heinous. He knew it was wrong, and therefore, violated that portion of the law.
(Report Abuse) December 29, 2014 10:11 am

Steve Johnson said:

Incidentally, I also have to wonder if bribery charges could not have been brought against him. He did offer a quid pro quo: To drop the charges in exchange for the picture taking.
(Report Abuse) December 29, 2014 10:46 am

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