

Lancaster man jailed for exposing himself to bus of Kindergarten students

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WEST CHESTER - A Lancaster County man who was described by supporters as 'an absolutely upstanding citizen' with 'very high moral standards' was nonetheless sent to Chester County Prison Monday on charges that he exposed himself to a bus full of kindergarten students.

The problem with the characterizations of Paul David Armstrong II, suggested Common Plea Judge Phyllis Streitl in her sentencing, is that they failed to take seriously his three prior convictions for similar behavior.

'I know this isn't who you want to be,' Streitl told Armstrong, a construction contracting engineer and father of two. 'But it is who you are. You appear to have a compulsion that has gotten out of control.'

Streitl, in sentencing Armstrong to 60 days to 12 months and a subsequent three years of probation and sex offenders counseling, said she was also troubled that despite apologizing for his crime in court, Armstrong has pleaded no contest to the indecent exposure charge against him.

'I don't think you are admitting to yourself that you are in trouble,' she said. 'I think someone would know if he exposed himself.'

Armstrong, 52, of Leola, a balding man with glasses, and the family and friend who accompanied him to court and spoke on his behalf, said that the incident for which he was sentenced was 'a huge mistake,' and that he was not trying to 'flash' the children on the bus. Instead, they suggested that a bladder infection had aggravated Armstrong on his way to an important business meeting, and he was forced to urinate in a bottle while driving on Route 202 through eastern Chester County. Indeed, that is the explanation that he gave to state troopers who interviewed him about the matter when he was taken into custody.

'The man they are trying to paint him as is not the man I married,' said his wife, Maribelle Armstrong, who told Streitel she met her husband in Bible study at their church, where he remains active. The incidents for which he had been previously arrested were the actions of a 'stupid' boy who had turned his life around, she said.

Steven Pacillio, the Media defense attorney representing Armstrong, argued that those convictions for open lewdness and indecent exposure should not be counted against his client because they occurred around 30 years ago, when he was in his 20s. He asked Streitel to sentence Armstrong to probation.

But Deputy District Attorney Carlos Barraza, who asked Streitel to impose a state prison sentence of one to two years behind bars, rejected the notion that Armstrong's actions had been an innocent mistake. Instead, he pointed to the similarities that existed between the current case and those from his past. In one of the previous cases, Armstrong had exposed himself to a school bus with children while he was driving, Barraza said. 'Mr. Armstrong, a vehicle, a school bus and him exposing himself. That sounds very familiar,' Barraza said.

'This was not a mistake,' the prosecutor added. 'This was a crime. This was not someone urinating.'

According to the information from the sentencing hearing and court documents, Armstrong was arrested by state police on June 11 on charges of indecent exposure, open lewdness, and corruption of minors.

A criminal complaint filed against him indicates that Trooper Robert Beyer, who was patrolling the area of I-76 in Montgomery County, received a call from a school bus driver for an unidentified private school that she had been travelling north on Route 202 near Route 29 in East Whiteland when she saw a 2005 Pontiac Vibe driving alongside the bus in the center lane.

She said that when she looked at the car, she could see the driver – a bald, middle-aged man wearing blue jeans and a polo shirt – with his pants unbuttoned and his penis exposed. The driver said she could see him waving and smiling at the bus. She was able to write down the car's license plate number and passed it along to Beyer.

Armstrong's car was stopped as he drove eastbound on I-76. When he was interviewed, he admitted having exposed himself but said he was 'taking a pee,' according to the criminal complaint.

Pacillio, in arguing for leniency, said that none of the children on the bus had seen him, and that there was no evidence that he was fondling himself. The charges of open lewdness and corruption of minors were dropped in the plea agreement, he said.

But Barraza said the fact that no children saw what was happening was because the adults on the bus distracted them from looking out the window. He said witnesses all confirmed that Armstrong was waving and smiling at the bus.

'Those are the actions of someone who is disturbed and has issues,' he said.

Armstrong told Streitel that he had turned his life around since the days of his previous convictions, which occurred in the early and mid-1980s.

'I have made huge changes in my life over the past 30 years, and have distanced myself from the person I was in college,' he said. 'I now live a correct, humane, decent lifestyle.'

Streitel, however, said that many people convicted of crimes come into her courtroom with tales of being 'a pillar in (their) community.'

'But this is a serious offense,' she said. 'I wouldn't want my children exposed to that when they were little.'

Armstrong, who was taken into custody at the end of the hearing, will be eligible for work release after serving two weeks of his sentence. While under court supervision, he is forbidden from having unsupervised contact with children other than his own.

Information from the Daily Local News, www.dailylocal.com

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