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Former Kennett Square officer pleads guilty to rape

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WEST CHESTER — A former Kennett Square police officer Monday admitted he had raped and sexually abused four young girls over a period of several years in a case that included allegations he dominated them by invoking a folk spirit who needed sex.

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Jose Manuel Santiago, 55, pleaded guilty to three counts of rape, three counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, and one count of aggravated indecent assault as his victims looked on in President Judge James P. MacElree II's courtroom.

As part of a plea agreement worked out between Assistant District Attorney Kimberly Callahan and defense attorney Christian Hoey of Paoli, Santiago was sentenced to 12½ to 25 years in state prison followed by 10 years of probation.

Santiago, who left the Kennett Square police force following his arrest in May 2010, gave no statement about the case other than to admit his guilt and agree with the facts Callahan placed on the record. Hoey said he had discussed the plea agreement with his client on numerous occasions as the

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pair prepared for Santiago’s trial, which was scheduled to begin Monday.

His victims, however, told the judge they had been deeply affected by the abuse they suffered at his hands, primarily because of the position of trust he held in their lives. One victim described him as a “father figure.”

“We trusted you and you used that to your advantage,” said one victim, a woman in her late 20s. “You took something from all of us — physically, mentally, and emotionally. And no matter how long the sentence is, we will never get that back.”

According to authorities, Santiago and the girls he molested over several years are practitioners of the Caribbean religion Santeria, which relies heavily on belief in folk spirits and gods. Prosecutors allege Santiago would sacrifice small animals, set his hands on fire and claim to embody the spirit of a god named Elegua during household rituals attended by his victims. The girls were age 9 to 18 or 19.

In an earlier proceeding, Callahan said the alleged victims resisted Santiago but were afraid of him because they believed he was possessed by Elegua and could harm people close to them.

The alleged assaults took place at his Toughkenamon home and in Chester. Callahan said the assault on three of the girls had taken place between January 1992 and February 1998, and that the assaults on the fourth victim took place between November 1993 and November 2000.

She said later a fifth victim would have testified at Santiago’s trial that he had sexually abused her as well, but that the date of the assault was outside the statute of limitations and so he could not be charged with that crime

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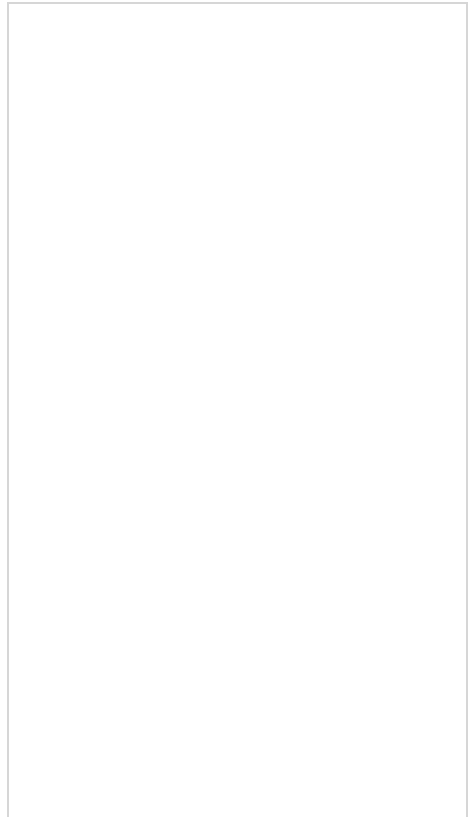


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