

Former Maine State Police chief charged with unlawful sexual contact with a child

By Beth Brogan , BDN Staff

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NEW GLOUCESTER, Maine — A former chief of the Maine State Police faces charges of unlawful sexual contact with a child younger than 12 years old.

Andrew E. Demers, 73, of New Gloucester turned himself in to the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office at 9 a.m. Monday. He was charged with unlawful sexual contact — a Class B crime — then released on \$5,000 cash bail, according to Cumberland County Sheriff Kevin Joyce.

The incidents that led to Demers' arrest allegedly took place during the past several months. The alleged victim was a young member of Demers' family, Joyce told the Bangor Daily News by phone Monday.

A tip from a previous employee of Demers' at the Maine State Police spurred the investigation, according to Joyce.

During the past week, detectives from the sheriff's office investigated reports of "an ongoing unlawful sexual contact situation," and in recent days interviewed witnesses and a suspected victim, according to a release from Joyce.

If convicted, Demers could serve up to 10 years in prison and face a maximum fine of \$20,000.

Demers served 26 years with the Maine State Police and held the position of chief from 1987 to 1993, when he retired.

In 2003, Demers was the most decorated officer in state police history and was named a "Legendary Trooper," the Sun Journal reported at the time.

A condition of Demers' release is that he not have contact with anyone younger than 16 years old.

On Monday, Col. Robert Williams, chief of the Maine State Police, released the following statement:

"The state police are stunned at the allegation and saddened for the victim and their family. Our thoughts and concerns are with them. We learned of the allegations last Monday and immediately referred the case to the Cumberland County district attorney's office. To avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest, we suggested that the Cumberland County Sheriff's Office investigate, and we have had no further involvement in the investigation."

Tamara Getchell, spokeswoman for the Cumberland County district attorney's office, said

Monday afternoon that the case remains under investigation and nothing has been filed in court.

In recent years, two other former state troopers — one who served on Maine's force and one from Massachusetts — were convicted of sex crimes in Maine.

In April 2012, Gregory Vrooman of Nobleboro, a 24-year veteran of the Maine State Police, was convicted of 12 sex crimes against a girl younger than 14 years old. He was sentenced to five years in prison with all but 21 months suspended.

In October 2011, retired Massachusetts State Trooper Joseph Silva of Newburyport, Mass., was convicted of gross sexual assault and two counts of aggravated assault against a woman in a Kittery motel. He will serve a total of 10 years in prison, with 10 years probation, WMTW TV reported at the time.

While declining to comment on the specific allegations, Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault spokeswoman Cara Courchesne said Monday that child sexual abuse is always perpetrated by someone who has more power and control than the child does, but when the perpetrator is a respected member of the community, that power often makes it more difficult for a victim to disclose the abuse.

"Take Jerry Sandusky," she said. "He was a pillar in the community, and then it turns out he's been sexually abusing boys for a number of years. The part of this that makes child sexual abuse cases more difficult than they already are is the cases often involve someone who people really respect and people really trust. ... With people who abuse children, an aspect of their behavior is they are able to gain the trust of the adults around the child and end up being able to perpetrate the abuse. In cases where there is an ongoing pattern of abuse, that is often the case."

To reach a sexual assault advocate, call the Statewide Sexual Assault Crisis and Support Line at 800-871-7741, TTY 888-458-5599. This free and confidential 24-hour service is accessible from anywhere in Maine. Calls are automatically routed to the closest sexual violence service provider.