

Former police chief sentenced in child porn case

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2014 Cop Pedophile Police Chief Brian Fanelli

WHITE PLAINS - Former Mount Pleasant Police Chief Brian Fanelli was sentenced to 18 months in prison and 5 years probation Wednesday for possession of child pornography.

"This is probably one of the most tragic and sad cases I've seen," U.S. District Court Judge Kenneth M. Karas said in announcing the sentence.

He said he took Fanelli's exemplary career, service to the community and devotion to his family into consideration, along with his efforts since his arrest "to get at whatever led him down this dark road," in therapy.

Nevertheless, he added, "the conduct here is very serious... the viewing of child pornography is part of a chain of child exploitation and abuse."

Fanelli, 56, pleaded guilty in July to one count of possession of pornography in U.S. District Court in White Plains. In exchange for the plea, prosecutors agreed not to seek a sentence of longer than four years, three months in prison. He faced a maximum of 10 years and up to \$250,000 in fines.

Federal probation authorities had recommended that Fanelli spend two years in prison; his lawyer asked that he be fined and sentenced to probation.

"He admitted (to investigators) to viewing and downloading child pornography on multiple occasions," federal prosecutor Anden Chow said in asking that Fanelli be sent to prison.

During his probation, Fanelli must stay away from children under 18 and register as a sex offender, the judge said.

Before he was sentenced, Fanelli, crying frequently as he read from a prepared statement, apologized to his family, the community and the Mount Pleasant Police Department.

"I know that each time a person views an image of child pornography, the child is being abused again," he said. "Knowing that I have caused harm to a child is immensely painful to me... I have dedicated my entire life to protecting people, especially children, and yet I did the unthinkable..."

As Fanelli spoke, a large contingent of family members, including his wife and two grown children, wiped tears and comforted each other. Most had submitted letters to the court, asking for leniency.

"Why I did this is something I'm examining in therapy... I take full responsibility for my actions,"

Fanelli said. "I have asked God for forgiveness and I believe that he will forgive me. But I am unable to forgive myself."

The Valhalla native was arrested in January 2014 — two months after he was appointed chief — when federal agents raided his Mahopac home and seized computers. He was accused of using a peer-to-peer file sharing network to download more than 120 files containing pornography involving children as young as 7.

Fanelli told investigators he first used the pornographic images as research for sex abuse awareness classes he taught to school children. According to investigators, Fanelli said he later began viewing them "for personal interest." Shortly after his arrest, Fanelli was removed from his volunteer teaching position at Shrub Oak's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church.

Ending his statement to the court, Fanelli vowed to "overcome this and become a better person... I don't know how, but I will once again become a productive member of society."

Fanelli retired after his arrest, and now draws an annual state pension of \$55,831. His case led to a Homeland Security investigation dubbed "Operation Caireen" that led to charges against 70 others, including a Boy Scout leader and a rabbi.

Karas ordered Fanelli to surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons on April 20 to begin his sentence. Until then, he remains on house arrest, and is required to wear an electronic monitor.