

Officer at southern Tennessee jail raped, impregnated female inmate, lawsuit states

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Published 3:26 p.m. CT Jan. 25, 2018



(Photo: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation)

In the early months of 2017, a correctional officer at a jail near the Tennessee-Alabama border routinely cornered a female inmate in the jail library, raping and eventually impregnating her before the assaults were discovered, according to a new federal lawsuit filed Wednesday.

Caleb Shane Hopkins, formerly employed at the Moore County Jail, is accused of forcing Jessica Fowler to engage in non-consensual sexual contact from February to May 2017, the lawsuit states.

Once other jail officials learned Fowler was pregnant, she was transferred to the Tennessee Prison for Women before giving birth, prematurely, in December.

She remains imprisoned, unable to have any prolonged access to her child.

"(Fowler) experienced significant physical and emotional trauma and suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of being raped and impregnated by Defendant Hopkins, as well as having to be pregnant and deliver a baby while incarcerated," the lawsuit states.

"Specifically, (Fowler) has experienced anxiety, depression, loss of appetite, loss of sleep, nightmares, and extreme physical pain both during and after the rapes."

Fowler is suing Hopkins for \$1 million and Moore County for \$300,000. However, there are no federal limits for damages in a case like this, so a judge could award a higher amount.

"The officer in this case has already taken responsibly for his actions by pleading guilty in criminal court. But the larger question is how he was able to rape Jessica on so many occasions over such a long period

of time in what is supposed to be a secure, monitored environment," said Ben Raybin, an attorney representing Fowler.

Tennessee does not name victims of sexual violence unless they publicly identify themselves. Fowler has agreed to allow the use of her name to shed light on what happened and in hopes no similar attacks happen again, Raybin said.

In November, Hopkins pleaded guilty in state court to two counts of sexual contact with an inmate by a law enforcement officer and two counts of official misconduct, according to plea petition provided by Raybin. Sentencing is set for February, according to the federal lawsuit.

Mark Stewart, an attorney for Hopkins, said Thursday afternoon he was unaware of the federal lawsuit and therefore declined to comment.

The lawsuit states Hopkins was hired at the jail in January. Before Hopkins completed his correctional officer training he was allowed to supervise inmates either on his own or with a limited number of other officers, the lawsuit states.

"Reasonable prison officials should be aware of the obvious and substantial risk that leaving a male corrections officer, who is new to the department and has not yet completed all training, alone with a female inmate on multiple occasions over an extended period of time in an area that does not have surveillance cameras and in which the corrections officer does not need to be could result in the male officer sexually assaulting the female inmate," the lawsuit states.

Moore County Jail Administrator Kay Solomon said in a brief phone interview Thursday she could not comment. Moore County attorney John Bobo did not immediately return a phone message.

The case is before U.S. District Court Judge William L. Campbell, Jr.