

Convicted Tulsa Officer Held in Contempt for Perjury

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A federal judge held former Tulsa police officer Jeff Henderson in contempt of court Wednesday for his false testimony last year.

U.S. District Judge James Payne added three months to Henderson's 42-month sentence for his 2011 conviction on six counts of perjury and two counts of civil rights violations in the Tulsa police corruption case.

The U.S. Bureau of Prisons website shows Henderson's estimated release date as August. Wednesday's ruling would push that back to November.

Henderson's attorney, Robert Wyatt IV, said he had informed Henderson's family, and that they are "disappointed" in the judge's order, filed in federal court for Oklahoma's Northern District.

"I haven't talked to Mr. Henderson, but I anticipate he will want to appeal, and I will certainly encourage it," Wyatt said.

Henderson's appeal in his police corruption convictions is ongoing, with the most recent arguments heard in November.

The testimony in question in the contempt case came in June during Tony Becknell Jr.'s petition for release from prison, which he was later granted and his sentence was vacated.

Henderson was brought back to Tulsa from federal prison in South Dakota to testify about the alleged informant he used against Becknell during Becknell's 2005 arrest in a drug case.

Henderson testified with an immunity agreement, which the judge ruled was given under the condition that his testimony be truthful.

After Henderson identified a man he alleged to be the informant, Becknell's attorney proved that the man was incarcerated in the Tulsa Jail at that time and could not have been the informant.

Several more hearings and court filings followed to establish whether Henderson should be held in contempt.

In his contempt order, Payne said Henderson's testimony was "emphatic as to the identity of particular (informants), and he projected an infallible memory of the facts from numerous TPD investigations."

Henderson later admitted that the testimony was false but called it an honest mistake due to strong similarities between the Becknell case and a prior case.

He also gave the name of another informant whom he might have used in the case, but that man is now dead, records show.

Payne said the outcome of the contempt case came down to Henderson's credibility.

"This court has now had the opportunity -- just as the judges and jury in Henderson's criminal case -- to see just how earnest and persuasive Henderson can be when he is testifying, even testifying falsely," Payne said in his order of contempt.

"This court ... finds that Henderson testified falsely with intent to obstruct the administration of justice. It was not an inadvertent mistake. After observing and listening to Henderson during both hearings, the court does not believe Henderson's testimony that he made an honest mistake about the identity of the RCI (reliable confidential informant)."

The federal corruption investigation resulted in charges against six current or former Tulsa police officers and a federal agent, as well as accusations of criminal behavior against five officers who were not charged.

In addition to Henderson, two other Tulsa police officers and the federal agent were convicted.

At least 46 people have been freed from prison or had their cases modified because of civil rights violations or potential problems with their cases stemming from the police corruption.

At least 14 lawsuits have been filed against the city and individual police officers as a result.

Police corruption

The law enforcement defendants:

--Jeff Henderson, who was hired by the Tulsa Police Department in 1995, was convicted on two counts of civil rights violations and six counts of perjury. He was acquitted on 45 counts of perjury, civil rights violations, drug conspiracy and witness tampering. Henderson was sentenced to 42 months in prison, which he is serving in South Dakota. Three months were added to that prison time Wednesday for contempt of court.

--Brandon McFadden, hired as an agent for the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in 2002, was sentenced to 21 months in a Texas prison after pleading guilty to drug conspiracy. McFadden cooperated with prosecutors.

--John K. "J.J." Gray, hired by the Tulsa Police Department in 1990, pleaded guilty to stealing money and was sentenced to four months in a Louisiana prison. Gray cooperated with prosecutors.

--Harold R. Wells, hired as a Tulsa police officer in 1975, was convicted on five counts, but a federal judge later dismissed one count. Wells was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison, which he is serving in Minnesota.

--Three police officers -- Nick DeBruin, Bruce Bonham and Bill Yelton -- were acquitted on civil rights violations in two cases.

Bonham was charged with five counts and DeBruin was charged with six counts related to theft of U.S. funds, civil rights violations, drug possession and possession of firearms. The Tulsa Police Department fired the two for failing to follow policies regarding "conduct unbecoming an officer" and "duty to be truthful and obedient."

Yelton retired about nine months after police announced that an internal investigation was under way.

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