



Sheriff Grady Judd

Polk County

1891 Jim Keene Blvd. • Winter Haven, FL 33880-8010 • Phone: 863.298.6200 • www.polksheriff.org

October 22, 2024

Senator Lauren Book
228 Senate Building,
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Senator Lauren Book,

Thank you for bringing your concerns regarding a 2016 sexual abuse case involving a juvenile to our attention. I am currently the Captain of the Bureau of Criminal Investigations which includes the Special Victim's Section responsible for investigating sexual abuse allegations. I was assigned to review the case file and upon examining the details of the case, I noted that Detective Melissa Turnage encountered several issues with the victim's initial interview.

- The victim claimed she was often made to go places with the suspect, however, multiple family members stated the victim wanted to and would often ask to go with the suspect.
- The victim advised of a specific convenience store where she claimed the suspect purchased condoms shortly before the sexual battery occurred. Detective Turnage responded to the store and obtained video surveillance; however, she was unable to find the suspect in the store purchasing condoms or even locate the suspect on video surveillance at all.
- The victim described the location where the sexual battery took place as possibly on the shoulder of Rockridge Road where 4 tires were stacked. Detective Turnage was unable to locate any tires on the shoulder of the roadway as described by the victim.
- Detective Turnage reviewed the victim's cellphone data and discovered she was texting on her phone during the time frame the incident occurred; however, she made no mention in her texts she was being abused nor did she indicate she was in danger.
- The victim advised several weeks before, her mother found a used condom wrapper in her dresser and became upset; however, her mother advised this was not true and she had never found a condom wrapper in the victim's room.
- The vehicle the victim advised the incident occurred in was processed utilizing an alternative light source, however, no body fluids were located.
- The victim reported the incident after being disciplined resulting in her cell phone being taken away.

Detective Turnage's efforts to corroborate the victim's account revealed significant challenges and at that time, no evidence was found to support her claims. Based on the information Detective Turnage had at the time, the case was forwarded to the State Attorney's Office for review.



Sheriff Grady Judd

Polk County

1891 Jim Keene Blvd. • Winter Haven, FL 33880-8010 • Phone: 863.298.6200 • www.polksheriff.org

The decision was made by the State Attorney's Office to prosecute the victim for False Information to Law Enforcement, where she later pled guilty.

After reviewing the case file, I determined Detective Turnage conducted a thorough investigation, however, after listening to an audio recorded follow up interview conducted by Detective Turnage, it was clear that her approach during the interview did not align with the high standards expected of the Polk County Sheriff's Office, particularly in the sensitive context of the Special Victims Section. It was clear Detective Turnage was trying to determine if the victim was being truthful, but while doing so, she asked/made inappropriate questions and statements.

As a result of the interview, Detective Turnage has been issued written discipline that has been placed in her personnel file. It should also be of note she is no longer assigned to the Special Victims Section.

We are committed to maintaining the integrity of our investigations and prioritizing the well-being of those we serve. Thank you for your continued support as we strive to uphold the highest standards in our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dina J. Russell".

Dina J. Russell

Captain

Polk County Sheriff's Office