



Two Michigan men headed to prison for molestation

Assistant prosecutor urges parents to do more to protect children.

October 31, 2011 | By DEBRA HAIGHT | South Bend Tribune Correspondent

NILES -- Two area men are going to prison on sexual molestation charges against children and teens after being sentenced in Berrien County Trial Court Monday.

Michael Paul Barrett, 31, of Hills Haven Road in Buchanan, pleaded guilty to four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct with the victim under 13 and one count of being a habitual offender. The incidents involved three young girls and took place from June 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011 in Buchanan Township and Stevensville.

Berrien County Trial Judge Scott Schofield sentenced Barrett to five concurrent terms of 10 years in prison after hearing from the uncle of one of the victims. Barrett was given credit for 41 days served. He must register as a sex offender for the rest of his life and have lifetime GPS monitoring.

He also had his probation revoked from a September conviction for accosting a child for immoral purposes.

The uncle said Barrett's molestation of his 9-year-old niece has left her scared and afraid.

"She wakes up in the middle of the night panicked and stressed to the max," he said. "She wants to tell us about what happened, it tears her apart. She will have to live with this the rest of her life. She keeps asking why."

"It's taken her a long time to build trust in me and her grandfather," the man added. "I don't understand how this man could take a little girl's innocence. To me, it's worse than murder. She will have to take this to her grave."

Assistant Prosecutor Cara Wilkinson said that "prison is an absolute necessity" for Barrett. She also urged parents to do more to protect their children, noting that the mother of one of the victims in this case didn't believe earlier allegations against Barrett and allowed him to move into her home at which time he molested her daughter.

Barrett apologized for his actions and said he needed help for his problems.

Schofield said it was appropriate to compare Barrett's actions to murder. "You have taken away a valuable part of this girl's life," he told Barrett. "It's not something she'll ever be able to forget. Whether she is scarred for life is an open question. I know only through time and counseling and a lot of hard work will she recover."

As for why Barrett and other child molesters do what they do, the judge said it's a question that's fairly easy to answer. "You treated this little girl as a plaything and not as a person, as someone who existed for your amusement and sexual gratification," he told Barrett.

"To you, it was a moment or two of pleasure. To her, it means a lifetime of pain."

In the other case, Clifford James Binkley, 23, of South 13th Street in Niles, was sentenced to three years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree criminal sexual conduct. The incident occurred Sept. 8 at a home in Berrien Springs. He was given credit for time served for failing to comply with sex offender registration.

The mother of the 15-year-old victim gave an emotional speech before the sentencing. "She wants to know why, why he came into her room," she said. "Why did you do this? We trusted you, it hurt us."

Wilkinson said this wasn't the first time Binkley had molested a child, having previously molested a 6-year-old boy.

"You violated this family in a number of ways," the judge said. "This is a family that opened their home to you and you betrayed their trust in a very major way. ... It may have been a moment of diversion for you but it's a lifetime of harm for her."

"You treated this young woman as a plaything, toy and object for sexual gratification and not as a person," he said. "It's hard to understand and forgive but fairly easy to explain. When you don't treat people as people but as playthings, you have a

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