

# Ex-Greece cheer coach pleads guilty to rape

SEAN LAHMAN

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Former Greece Olympia High School cheerleading coach Christina Jewell-Belluccio pleaded guilty Thursday to third-degree rape as a result of her sexual encounters with a 16-year-old male student who attended the school. The incidents occurred at her house and another location in June 2014. Under the plea agreement, Jewell-Belluccio will serve eight work Sundays with the Monroe County Jail and will be on probation for a term of 10 years. She will also be required to register as a sex offender and an order of protection was issued prohibiting her from having contact with her victim for eight years.

According to testimony in court, she met the victim while she was working in the school's attendance office. She resigned from her position with the Greece Central School District — both as cheer coach and teacher's aide — after she was criminally charged in May 2015. Her attorney, Stephen Secru, said that Jewell-Belluccio had "led a remarkable life except for that short period of time last June." Secru noted that she'd been honored by her peers, being named Class A Coach of the Year during the 2014 Winter Section V Cheerleading Sectionals.

He also submitted roughly fifty letters of support, mostly from cheerleaders and their parents, testifying to Jewell-Belluccio's contributions as a coach and her status as a role model for the female students she worked with. That drew a sharp response from acting Monroe County Court Judge Melchor Castro, who said she had broken a sacred trust. "It doesn't mean you're a good person just because they say you are," he said. Castro also took exception to suggestions that the victim had played a role in initiating the sexual relationship, or the argument that because the victim was a male, it was a less serious offense.

"If the genders were reversed, there would be much less sympathy for you," he said. "If you were a male coach who'd engaged in a sexual relationship with a female student, nobody would be saying 'that's not wrong.' "Some people would say it's not really rape," Castro added, "but it is."

Assistant District Attorney Kyle Rossi said after court that he agreed with the judge's comments.

"It's easy to say that there's a double standard, that when an offender is a woman and the victim is a male, people might think it's not quite as serious. I disagree with that," he said. Rossi said there was a good reason for the law to recognize and enforce age-based sex crimes, regardless of gender and regardless of whether the activities are alleged to be consensual. "Children at certain age levels are not equipped to make decisions that adults make. That's why the law makes it illegal for them to engage in certain activities with adults," he said. "It's not healthy, it's not good for them, and they're not equipped to deal with it at that age." Rossi also said that any jail sentence Jewell-Belluccio received would be nominal compared to the consequences of having to register as a sex offender.

"Her sentence is stigmatizing. It's a very severe sentence if you're familiar with the terms and conditions of sex offender probation," he said.

As part of that status, the 33-year-old won't be able to resume her work coaching high school athletes or be employed in a school. She's blocked from any unsupervised contact with individuals under the age of 17, excluding her own daughter.

In court, Secru said that his client had been completely forthright with police during their investigation and had expressed sincere remorse for her actions. He also said that she was deeply embarrassed and felt she had brought shame to her family.

Judge Castro reserved decision about whether Jewell-Belluccio would be classified as a Level 1 or Level 2 sex offender. He said that he would issue a ruling on that matter next week.

[SLAHMAN@Gannett.com](mailto:SLAHMAN@Gannett.com)



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