

The Palm Beach Post

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How will system judge Palm Beach predator?

We soon will find out whether big money can buy from the criminal justice system what everyone assumes that big money can buy.

The penalty news reports say part-time Palm Beach resident Jeffrey Epstein is expected to face suggests that he will plead guilty to something more than one felony count for solicitation of prostitution. A Palm Beach County grand jury indicted the Manhattan money manager on that charge in July 2006. But a guilty plea that does not recognize the age of the girls whom police say the billionaire paid for sex would be a disservice to the girls, an insult to the investigators who pressed the case and, for good measure, a general outrage.

Palm Beach police have said that Jeffrey Epstein, 54, paid underage girls, one as young as 14, to come to his 7,200-square-foot waterfront home for "massage" sessions. Police said interviews with five alleged victims and 17 witnesses under oath, phone messages, a high school transcript and other items they found in Mr. Epstein's trash and home show that he knew how young the girls were. But after Mr. Epstein's attorneys told prosecutors about the girls' MySpace pages, which mentioned marijuana and alcohol use, State Attorney Barry Krischer sent the case to a grand jury, instead of filing charges himself.

Blaming these victims, however, does not make them any more deserving of what happened. And Mr. Krischer's unnecessary handoff to a grand jury, after an 11-month police investigation, more than reinforced

Jeffrey Epstein case comes to turning point.

the public understanding that the more money the accused has, the bigger the break he gets. Mr. Epstein's legal team includes West Palm Beach defense attorney Jack Goldberger, Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz, who worked on the O.J. Simpson murder case, and Kenneth Starr, who once pursued a president based on his lies about sex with young women.

Federal authorities also stepped in, which stalled the state's case for another year. On Nov. 9, citing an unnamed source close to Jeffrey Epstein, Jose Lambiet of *The Post* wrote that the federal investigation is over, and Mr. Epstein is expected to serve up to 18 months and could be labeled a sex offender in criminal records. The charge the grand jury returned more than a year ago carries a maximum five-year prison term and no "sex offender" label.

"This case," Mr. Goldberger told Mr. Lambiet, "is absolutely going to end without a trial within the next two months." State attorney spokesman Michael Edmondson would not confirm any plea deal. But, he noted: "The state attorney's hands are not tied by there being a single grand jury charge. That does not preclude additional charges."

Jeffrey Epstein, like too many men in Florida, preyed on teenaged girls. The system should not let him buy his way out of that reality.