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Rich man fought the law — and he mostly won

Two years after a grand jury indicted him on a felony charge of solicitation of prostitution, Jeffrey Epstein finally admitted that he lured a teenage girl to his \$8.5 million, 13,000-square-foot Palm Beach mansion for sex. A week ago, the 55-year-old investment banker began serving 18 months in jail.

But that plea deal — guilty of felony solicitation of prostitution and procuring a person under the age of 18 for prostitution — does not account for all five of the girls, one as young as 14, who alleged that Epstein sexually abused them. And why is Epstein serving his term in the overcrowded Palm Beach County Jail and not a state prison, where inmates are sent if their sentences are longer than one year?

The slow, dissatisfying resolution of the case sends a message to the public that there's a different system of justice for the wealthy who hire high-powered lawyers. Epstein's legal team included West Palm Beach defense attorney Jack Goldberger, Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz, who defended O.J. Simpson against murder charges, and Kenneth Starr, the prosecutor who pursued then-President Bill Clinton for lying about sex with young women.

Palm Beach police spent 11 months investigating Epstein before State Attorney Barry Krischer sent the case to a grand jury, instead of charging Epstein so the man who once boasted of accepting only billionaire clients could face a trial. The police had taken a high school transcript, class schedules and phone messages from Epstein's

Why is Jeffrey Epstein in jail, and not prison?

home that showed he knew the girls were underage. Yet Mr. Krischer was more swayed by Epstein's lawyers, who attempted to impugn the girls' character by showing they had chatted on Myspace.com about smoking marijuana and drinking. He should have let a jury decide whether the victims — and Epstein — were credible.

Ultimately, one charge against Epstein finally reflected the age of one victim, and the plea agreement left Epstein labeled a sex offender. With that additional charge, if Epstein had been convicted at a trial, he could have been sentenced to anything from probation to 15 years in prison, Assistant State Attorney Lanna



Belohlavek said, adding that the recommended guideline sentence was 21 months.

Epstein also won't have to certify to the court that he is receiving counseling, typically required of sex offenders, because he has a private psychiatrist. But without court supervision, who will ensure Epstein is in fact being treated?

The plea deal also drops a federal investigation of Epstein. If a federal investigation was warranted, how does dropping it before completion benefit the public?

Epstein preyed on girls and denied it. For three years, his wealth and the influence of his lawyers bought him the protection the state attorney owed to the victims.

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