

Work-release for sex offender Jeffrey Epstein an insult to victims, public

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The disclosure that convicted sex offender and Palm Beach billionaire Jeffrey Epstein gets to leave his cell at the Palm Beach County Stockade six days a week for 12 hours a day as part of a work-release program is appalling and distasteful.

The seriousness of the charges against Mr. Epstein, who pleaded guilty June 30 to two felony counts — soliciting prostitution and procuring a person younger than 18 for prostitution — as well as the seemingly facile time he is serving at the stockade, make his work release an insult to his victims and the public.

Mr. Epstein, 55, began the work-release program on Oct. 10, just over three months into his supposed 18-month sentence. Yet, astonishingly, neither his victims, their attorneys claim, nor the U.S. Attorney's Office were notified in a timely manner by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Add that to the fact that he is let out for an astounding 72 hours a week. Mr. Epstein only ends up behind bars — in the stockade and not a state prison, where inmates whose sentences are longer than a year are usually sent — only 96 hours of the 168 in a week. He returns every night at 10 p.m., so much of the time he is incarcerated, he is sleeping.

Because of the sweetheart deal his team of high-priced lawyers worked out, Mr. Epstein already has received far more lenient treatment than others convicted of the same crimes. For example, his lawyers stonewalled the investigation, prolonging judgment for three years. And Mr. Epstein's deferred prosecution agreement states that federal charges will be dropped as long as he does not violate certain conditions of the plea, which is needlessly and shamefully under seal from public eye.

Such an arrangement is unacceptable because a convicted sex offender should not be released into the community with minimal supervision. An ankle bracelet with GPS capabilities and a permit deputy, paid by Mr. Epstein himself for his own protection, is little comfort to the community.

To everyone except Mr. Epstein, the plea deal, the incarceration at the stockade and the limited time behind bars are a disgrace. Allowing him to join a work-release program with such loose restrictions makes it seem that he isn't even being punished for what he did. Instead of justice, we are left with another abominable example of the court system working differently for the wealthy.

Mr. Epstein's attorney Jack Goldberger incredibly calls his client "a good guy" and someone who "deserves work release."

No, he isn't a "good guy." He is a sex offender, a convict, someone who was lewd with young girls. It's about time someone starts treating him like the criminal he is.

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