

Palm Beach sex offender Jeffrey Epstein 'treated differently'

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A lawyer who represents six victims of convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein wants to know why it took eight weeks for him to learn that the jailed billionaire was out on a work-release program.

"It just doesn't seem like these girls are getting justice," Miami attorney Jeffrey Herman said.

One of Herman's clients called him last week, expressing anxiety that she was going to run into Epstein in the community, he said.

Herman said he assured her that Epstein was still in jail. Days later on Dec. 5, Herman received a letter from the U.S. Attorney's Office, informing him and his clients that Epstein has been participating in the work release program since Oct. 10 and spends six days a week at his Florida Science Foundation office on Australian Avenue in West Palm Beach.

According to the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, victims should have received letters dated Oct. 14 informing them that Epstein was out on work release. The sheriff's office said it programmed the victims' homes into its GPS system, so the department would be alerted by Epstein's tracking device if he were to go near their homes.

"A lot of the girls have the fear that they're going to run into him somewhere," Herman said. "Then I had to tell them that he was out on work release and had been for weeks. To a young girl, with this kind of sexual assault, it's devastating. My clients are outraged."

Epstein, 55, is allowed out six days a week from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. and has been approved for work release since Oct. 10, according to Teri Barbera, spokeswoman for the sheriff's office.

There are currently 20 prisoners in the work-release program, 18 men and two women, according to sheriff's records.

Epstein pleaded guilty June 30 to two felony counts: soliciting prostitution and procuring a person under 18 for prostitution.

Judge Deborah Pucillo sentenced him to 18 months at the Palm Beach County Jail, followed by 12 months of house arrest.



Lee Hershfield

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

The money manager and convicted sex offender spends six days a week at his Florida Science Foundation office in West Palm Beach. He has been participating in a work-release program since Oct. 10.

As part of the plea agreement, Epstein must register as a lifelong sex offender.

The fact that Epstein, as a convicted sex offender, was allowed the option of work release is under question.

"There always seem to be certain offenses that don't qualify for work release," West Palm Beach criminal defense attorney Michelle Suskauer said. "For example, crimes of violence. I would think sex crimes (or) if someone has a history of escape, you would think that would put someone at a higher risk of being unsuccessful in the work-release program."

The case has certainly been handled in an unusual manner, said Suskauer, who was not involved in the case.

"Normally someone who has been charged with something like this would be sent to prison" upon conviction, not a county jail, she said. "It's too obvious to say, but he was treated differently."

The West Palm Beach lawyer said it is not typical for sex offenders to be given the option of work release.

"Most people don't get that opportunity to leave every day and work instead of just sitting around counting their days," Suskauer said.

Michael Seigel, a law professor at the University of Florida, was stunned at the length of Epstein's sentence.

"My reaction is that is a very, very lenient sentence for someone who is convicted of a sex crime in the State of Florida," said Seigel, a former federal prosecutor who has specialized in criminal law for more than 20 years.

The fact that Epstein will carry the "sex offender" label for the rest of his life is the most onerous part of his sentencing, restricting where he can live and work, Seigel said.

"But the idea of soliciting a minor in this day and age is a pretty serious offense," the law professor said.

Work release is a fairly typical allowance for some types of crimes.

"That part of it is not so unusual (work release); it's just that he got to it so quickly because he had such a lenient sentence in the first place," Seigel said. "Most people spend more time in jail."

Epstein was indicted two years ago after an 11-month investigation by Palm Beach police, who concluded that Epstein paid five underage girls for massages and sexual contact at his 358 El Brillo Way home. Since then, more minor girls have come forward with claims of sexual abuse by Epstein.

In addition to the criminal case, there are nine federal and seven state lawsuits pending against the Manhattan money manager. All contain similar allegations: Epstein, through his employees and assistants, brought minor girls to his Palm Beach home for erotic massages and sometimes sex.

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