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HEADLINE: ATTORNEY FOR EPSTEIN VICTIMS: 'I HAVE NEVER SEEN A STRANGER CASE'

BYLINE: MICHELE DARGAN, MICHELE DARGAN, Daily News Staff Writer

BODY:

Sex offender Jeffrey Epstein could have been charged with multiple counts of five federal offenses involving sex acts with minors and faced a life sentence, but, instead, the government agreed not to prosecute him or his procurers if he spent 18 months in the county jail on two state charges.

Those were the details unsealed Friday in a nine-page federal non-prosecution agreement that lets Epstein and co-conspirators [REDACTED] Lesley Groff and [REDACTED] off the hook for any of those past crimes.

"He could have gone to prison for life and somehow he's getting immunity in exchange for nothing?" said Fort Lauderdale attorney Brad Edwards, who represents three Epstein victims. "I have never seen a stranger case. To me, it's more spectacular what's not in it. It's the U.S. Attorney's Office saying we'll do everything in our power to see he doesn't get punished."

Edwards has been fighting for a year in federal and state court to unseal the agreement.

"The non-prosecution agreement raises more questions than it answers," said Miami attorney Adam Horowitz, who represents seven victims. "Why did all the co-conspirators receive immunity? Why were the victims not consulted regarding the sentence? Why did he receive such a minimal sentence?"

The federal deal has remained sealed in Epstein's state court file since he pleaded guilty in June 2008 to state charges of procuring a minor for prostitution and soliciting prostitution.

U.S. Attorney's Office does not comment

The federal charges he could have faced were: conspiracy to persuade minor females to engage in prostitution, conspiracy to travel to engage in illicit sexual conduct with minor females, persuading minor females to engage in prostitution, traveling to engage in illicit sexual conduct with minor females and causing a person under 18 years to engage in sex for money while knowing they are underage.

The charges carry various statutory penalties ranging from 10 years to life, with a minimum mandatory of at least 10 years.

Alicia Valle, spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Miami, declined comment.

Expert: Feds take few sex-assault cases

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North Palm Beach criminal defense attorney Barry Maxwell said he is not surprised that federal charges weren't filed.

"My experience has been that the federal government does not intervene in sex-assault cases, except if we're dealing with a serial rapist or it crosses jurisdictional lines," Maxwell said. "It's either not a big enough case or not atrocious enough for them."

Epstein, 56, served 13 months of his 18-month sentence at the Palm Beach County Stockade and received liberal work-release privileges while in jail. He was able to go to his West Palm Beach office six days a week for up to 16 hours a day.

He is now serving one year of probation at his Palm Beach mansion and is registered as a lifelong sex offender.

Epstein 'fully abided' by deal, says defense

Epstein's attorney Jack Goldberger released the following statement: "This document relates to allegations that were made many years ago. It was by its provisions and agreement of the parties to remain confidential in part to protect the identities of collateral third parties.

"Mr. Epstein has fully abided by all of its terms and conditions. He is looking forward to putting this difficult period of his life behind him. He is continuing his longstanding history of science philanthropy both here in South Florida and nationwide."

Goldberger had blocked the unsealing by filing court papers asking that the documents stay sealed "to prevent a serious imminent threat to the fair, impartial and orderly administration of justice; to protect a compelling government interest; to avoid substantial injury to innocent third parties; and to avoid substantial injury to a party by disclosure of matters protected by a common law and privacy right, not generally inherent in these specific type of proceedings, sought to be closed."

Circuit Judge Jeffrey Colbath ordered the agreement to be unsealed in June, but Epstein's attorneys appealed the ruling to the Fourth District Court of Appeals, which affirmed Colbath's ruling. Colbath had ruled that the federal agreement -- sealed in state court -- was improperly sealed.

'I felt it was my fault'

More than a dozen lawsuits against the billionaire money manager have been filed in federal and state court, all with similar allegations: that a minor girl was taken to Epstein's mansion on El Brillo Way and led upstairs to a spa room by one of Epstein's assistants, where he would ask the girl to perform massages and/or various sex acts, for which he would pay her.

One victim, who is known as Jane Doe #5 in a federal court lawsuit against Epstein, said she didn't find out about the deal until after it was finalized. She was 15 at the time one of her schoolmates told her she could make \$200 by giving a massage to a man in Palm Beach.

She says she was "nervous and scared and wanted to leave" once she got to Epstein's spa room.

"I thought, 'I can't call my dad or my mom because I'm stuck in this situation and didn't know what to do,'" she said. "I really didn't know what this man was capable of. For a long time, I felt like it was my fault and that's exactly what he wanted me to feel."

Epstein has curfew

While he is serving the 12 months of house arrest at his Palm Beach home, Epstein must observe a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, have no unsupervised contact with anyone younger than 18 and not view, own or possess pornographic or sexual materials.

The indictment followed an 11-month investigation by Palm Beach police, who said Epstein paid five underage girls for massages and sometimes sex at his El Brillo Way home. Then-State Attorney ██████████ declined to prosecute Epstein on multiple charges involving unlawful sex acts with minors. Instead, he brought the case to a grand jury, which charged Epstein on the lesser charge of soliciting prostitution.

Then-Palm Beach Police Chief ██████████ wrote ██████████ a letter asking him to recuse himself from the case. When that didn't happen, ██████████ requested an FBI investigation to determine if any federal laws were broken.

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'Out of the ordinary'

West Palm Beach criminal defense attorney Gregg Lerman said several aspects of the Epstein case are unusual.

"I don't understand why it would be a federal case in this circumstance, and why was there anything in writing at all and why did they seal the agreement?" Lerman said. "Why did it go to the grand jury instead of through the state filing lewd assault charges? That's unusual. And it's very unusual that they structure a plea to get county time rather than prison time. That's definitely out of the ordinary. Nobody goes to county jail as a state criminal punishment."



GRAPHIC: Caption: Epstein Deal does not allow prosecution of co- conspirators.

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