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# Victims win right to see negotiations that led to 'lenient' plea agreement for billionaire sex offender

## Latest in legal saga involving Jeffrey Epstein, 61, financier convicted of procuring minor for prostitution

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Jeffrey Epstein

Jeffrey E. Epstein pleaded guilty in 2008 to soliciting prostitutes at his Palm Beach mansion. (The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office via The New York Times / April 21, 2014)

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By Brett Clarkson, Sun Sentinel

7:43 p.m. EDT, April 21, 2014

Did a Palm Beach billionaire being investigated for having sex with young girls use his wealth to negotiate a lenient and secret agreement that saw him avoid federal prosecution?

Attorneys for two victims, known only as Jane Doe 1 and 2, may soon get an answer thanks to an appeals court ruling against financier and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, 61.

The ruling, issued Friday, orders federal authorities to disclose the correspondence that took place between Epstein's attorneys and federal prosecutors when they were negotiating a 2007 agreement, which allowed him to escape federal prosecution if he pleaded guilty to state charges that carried a lesser penalty.

"We're trying to figure out if Epstein used his political connections and great wealth to secure this kind of arrangement, that was unheard of, frankly, if you look at these charges," said Paul Cassell, an attorney for the women.

Epstein is a native New Yorker who according to media reports built a huge fortune as a money manager and owns several properties including a primary residence in [Manhattan](#), a Palm Beach mansion and his own island in the Caribbean. At one point he counted among his friends former President [Bill Clinton](#), [Donald Trump](#) and other high-powered figures.

The appeal court decision described the background of Epstein's case, stating that in 2006, the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) "began investigating allegations that Jeffrey Epstein had sexually abused several minor girls."

In September 2007, federal prosecutors struck the non-prosecution deal with Epstein, but didn't tell the victims, court filings say.

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"Not only did the United States neglect to confer with the victims before it entered into the agreement with Epstein, it also failed to notify them of its existence for at least nine months," Circuit Judge William H. Pryor wrote in the appeals court decision.

In June 2008, Epstein pleaded guilty to a state charge of procuring a person under the age of 18 for prostitution and was sentenced to 18 months in prison. He spent 13 months behind bars, and is registered as a sex offender in Florida.

The situation also resulted in civil suits being filed against Epstein, who according to media reports settled claims from about two dozen young women who alleged he paid them for sexual massages at his Palm Beach mansion, some as young as 14, according to media reports.

To the attorneys who represent the Jane Does 1 and 2, the sentence was much lighter than the years, or possibly decades, that Epstein could've spent behind bars had he been prosecuted in the federal system.

They're hoping that the correspondence, ordered released by the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, will shed light on what they say is an unusually lenient deal.

"I can say that I've been teaching criminal law for more than two decades and I have never seen a plea agreement as lenient as this one, for hands-on sex offenders," said Cassell, who is based in Salt Lake City.

But one of Epstein's attorney's, Martin Weinberg, based in Boston, disputed those characterizations. Weinberg said Monday that the plea agreement was "reached in good faith" and that "it's not a fair conclusion" to describe the agreement as either improper or tainted by Epstein's wealth.

"It's Mr. Cassell's hope that this correspondence may support that theory, but the reality is that the U.S. Attorney's Office made a responsible judgment in how to implement the law," Weinberg said.

Weinberg said he was concerned about the potential impact the ruling would have on the ability of criminal defense attorneys and prosecutors to communicate confidentially.

He also said he and Epstein co-counsel, Miami criminal defense attorney Roy Black, will ask the Atlanta-based appeals court to review the decision.

As for the Jane Does, who are now over 18, it's just the latest development in a long legal saga, another one of their attorneys said.

"They're pretty numb at this point to favorable news because they've heard this before and nothing's happened," said [Fort Lauderdale](#) attorney Brad Edwards.

Edwards and Cassel said their goal is to have Epstein's plea agreement deemed to be in violation of federal victims' rights legislation and invalidated. Edwards said Epstein should face a new prosecution.

Edwards also said he was first told by the U.S. Attorney's Office that he would receive the correspondence documents on Monday, but was then told that they weren't ready yet. Cassell said the documents number 500 pages.

In an email, Annette Castillo, spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of Florida, said the office couldn't comment.

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