

Palm Beach billionaire with ties to VI pleads guilty in prostitution case

(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the Palm Beach Post on Monday, June 30. Jeffrey Epstein owns Little St. James Island off the coast of St. Thomas and employed first lady Cecile de Jongh as director of his charitable J. Epstein Virgin Islands Foundation.)

BY LARRY KELLER
Palm Beach Post

WEST PALM BEACH — He lives in a Palm Beach waterfront mansion and has kept company with the likes of President Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew and Donald Trump, but investment banker Jeffrey Epstein will call the Palm Beach County jail home for the next 18 months.

Epstein, 55, pleaded guilty this morning to felony solicitation of prostitution and procuring a person under the age of 18 for prostitution.

After serving 18 months in jail, he will be under house arrest for a year. And he will now have a life-long obligation to register as a sex offender. He must submit to an HIV test within 48 hours, with the results being provided to his victims or their parents.

As part of the plea deal, federal investigators agreed to drop their pending investigation of Epstein, which they had taken to a grand jury, two law enforcement sources said.

Epstein was indicted two years ago following an 11-month investigation by Palm Beach police after they received a complaint from the relative of a 14-year-old girl who had given him a naked massage at his five-bedroom, 7,234-square-foot, \$8.5 million Intracoastal home.



Epstein

Police concluded that there were several other young girls brought in 2004 and 2005 to an upstairs room at the home for similar massages and sexual touching.

The indictment charged Epstein only with felony solicitation of prostitution. The state attorney's office later added the additional charge of procuring underage girls for that purpose.

Prosecutor Lanna Belohlavek said of the plea: "I took into consideration the length the trial would have been and witnesses having to testify about sometimes embarrassing incidents.

Epstein may have made a serious mistake soon after he was charged. He was offered and accepted, then rejected, an offer to plead guilty to one count of aggravated assault with intent to commit a felony, according to police documents. He would have gotten five years' probation, had no crim-

inal record and not been a registered sex offender, the documents indicate.

Epstein arrived in court today with at least three attorneys. He wore a blue blazer, blue jeans and white and gray sneakers. After Circuit Judge Deborah Dale Pucillo accepted the plea, he was fingerprinted. Epstein then removed his coat and was handcuffed for the trip to jail while his attorneys tried to shield him from photographers' lenses.

When he eventually is released, Epstein will have to comply with numerous conditions of his house arrest. They include observing a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, having no unsupervised contact with anybody under the age of 18 and not owning or possessing pornographic or sexual materials "that are relevant to your deviant behavior," the judge said.

He also will not be allowed to drive alone without his probation officer's permission, or volunteer anywhere where children may congregate, such as a school or a park.

Epstein will be allowed to leave home for work. The New York-based money manager told the judge he has formed the not for profit Florida Science Foundation to finance scientific research. "I'm there every day," Epstein said.

The foundation was incorporated in November and lists its address as Goldberger's West Palm Beach office. Epstein said he already has awarded money to Harvard and MIT.

When he is released from jail, there is a chance that Epstein will be forced to move. Sex offenders are not allowed to live within 1,000 feet of a school, park or other areas where children may gather. No

determination has been made as to whether Epstein's home complies, but attorneys said it likely does.

Sex offenders also typically must attend counseling sessions. Belohlavek said that was waived for Epstein because his private psychiatrist is working with him. Judge Pucillo was skeptical, but agreed to it.

Epstein's conduct with underage girls doesn't end with today's plea.

There are four pending federal civil lawsuits and one in state court related to his behavior. At least one woman has sued him in New York, where he owns a 51,000 square-foot Manhattan mansion.

"We think this is an extremely important event that will help the civil cases," said Miami attorney Jeffrey Herman, who represents the alleged victims in the federal lawsuits. "It's validation of what we're saying in the civil cases."

West Palm Beach attorney Ted Leopold represents one alleged victim in a civil suit in state court. He said he anticipates amending that lawsuit to add "a few other clients" as well.

In the criminal case, police went so far as to scour Epstein's trash and conduct surveillance at Palm Beach International Airport, where they watched for his private jet so they would know when he was in town. They concluded that Epstein paid girls \$200 to \$300 each after the massage sessions.

"I'm like a Heidi Fleiss," [redacted] now 22, told police about her efforts in recruiting teenage girls for Epstein.

There was probable cause to charge Epstein with unlawful sex acts with a minor and lewd and

lascivious molestation, police concluded. They also wanted charges brought against Robson and a woman who was Epstein's personal assistant. They were not charged.

The state attorney's office said that questions about the girls' credibility led it to take the unprecedented step of presenting the evidence against Epstein to a grand jury, rather than directly charging him.

Palm Beach Police Chief Michael Reiter was furious with State Attorney Barry Krischer, saying in a May 2006 letter that the prosecutor should disqualify himself. "I continue to find your office's treatment of these cases highly unusual," he wrote. He then asked for and got a federal investigation. He did not return a call asking for comment.

Epstein hired a phalanx of high-priced lawyers — including Harvard law professor and author Alan Dershowitz — and public relations people who questioned Reiter's competence and the victims' truthfulness.

In addition to mansions in Palm Beach and Manhattan, Epstein owns homes in New Mexico and the Virgin Islands. He's a frequent contributor to Democratic Party candidates. He also donated \$30 million to Harvard University in 2003.

Former New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer returned a \$50,000 campaign contribution from Epstein after his indictment, then resigned this year amidst his own sex scandal. And the same Palm Beach Police Department that vigorously investigated Epstein returned his \$90,000 donation for the purchase of a firearms simulator.