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News

Prosecutor Shows Monrovia Boot Camp Instructor Had Pattern of Handcuffing Youth

Kelvin "Sgt. Mac" McFarland--who has been charged with kidnapping, child abuse, extortion and more--had his motion to dismiss the charges denied.

By [Dan Abendschein](#) | [Email the author](#) | June 15, 2011 [Print](#)

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The director of a local youth program who has been arrested for kidnapping, child abuse and more, had his motion to dismiss the charges denied at the second day of his preliminary hearing on Tuesday.

Kelvin McFarland, 41, of Monrovia, known to his students as "Sgt. Mac," runs a program in Southern California called Family 1st Growth Camp that focuses on intense exercise as a punishment for misbehavior. He was [arrested on May 27](#) for allegedly handcuffing a 14-year-old girl who was skipping school and then attempting to extort money from her parents after bringing her home.

Tuesday's hearing further highlighted vastly differing perceptions of McFarland, with supporters talking about how important the program was to their children and testimony against McFarland painting him as controlling and somewhat frightening.

The alleged victim testified that Sgt. Mac threatened to lock her up at a juvenile facility, repeatedly "screamed" at her after bringing her to her parent's home and insisted on driving her to a friend's home to end their friendship.

But others who testified Tuesday described him as a man trying to help improve the lives of teenagers through tough love tactics.

Handcuffing Pattern

Testimony in the hearing on Tuesday argued that the 14-year-old girl, identified in court only by her first name of Lady, was not the only youth McFarland handcuffed as part of his program.

A friend of the 14-year-old victim testified at Tuesday's hearing that when she was in Sgt. Mac's program, she also had been handcuffed and taken from her home to go participate in intense exercise meant to help correct misbehavior.

Still, while the girl (who was identified only by her first name of Stephanie) told the court that McFarland handcuffed her, she also described him as "a really nice man," and said it was fine with her when he handcuffed her.

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The prosecutor in the case, Carolina Lugo, also told the court that at least one other person has come forward with similar complaints against McFarland and said she believes there could be more charges filed against him.

"We anticipate more people will be coming forward," Lugo said.

Another parent told [Patch and other reporters on Monday](#) that McFarland entered his daughter's room at his ex-wife's request and forcibly dragged her off her bed before hauling her off to the Rose Bowl for intense physical workouts.

Others at the hearing told reporters a much different story: As on Monday, a crowd of parents and children enrolled in the program showed up to support Sgt. Mac. One [teen told Patch](#) on Monday that Sgt. Mac was always there to help her out when she was in trouble. In addition, McFarland's lawyer said that judges in the county superior court system have recommended at-risk youth cases to his program.

Charges Upheld

After a hearing of more than six hours over two days, Judge Stan Blumenfeld denied McFarland's request to dismiss all charges and held him to answer for the charges of kidnapping, child abuse, false imprisonment, extortion and unlawful use of a badge.

Blumenfeld did reduce McFarland's bail by \$100,000 and said that while the evidence presented to him so far suggested that McFarland did kidnap Lady, it appears to have done with "a benign intent."

In fact, Blumenfeld initially suggested he would reduce McFarland's bail by almost \$200,000 until Lugo brought up McFarland's past criminal record, which includes DUIs and a misdemeanor prostitute solicitation charge. She also told the judge she believes there are additional victims who have been mistreated by McFarland.

Differing Accounts

Testimony over the two-day hearing showed different accounts of what exactly transpired between McFarland and his alleged victim.

The prosecution's witnesses generally supported the notion that both Lady and her father believed McFarland was a law enforcement officer and gave him \$100 believing that they owed bail of some sort based on her being picked up after skipping school.

The defense witnesses supported the idea that McFarland never represented himself as a police officer and was paid the \$100 because Lady's father, Roberto Muniz, wanted to enroll her in McFarland's program.

McFarland's wife also testified that she spoke to Muniz about the program and gave him information on when to bring Lady in to start the program. She said he never showed up to the orientation session that he paid the \$100 for to attend.

Witnesses differed on what kind of badge McFarland showed that represented himself as a law enforcement officer. McFarland's lawyer, Bill Paparian, acknowledged the prosecutor's contention that McFarland wore a small honorary Pasadena Police Department badge that is available to the public.

That badge was small enough that Pasadena Police Department Detective Monica Cuellar described it as "tiny, small, and pin-like."

However, Cuellar also testified that Muniz told her McFarland showed him a larger badge, while Paparaian contended that he did not.

Credibility of Witnesses

As in Monday's hearing, where he accused the alleged victim of lying, Paparian questioned the credibility of the prosecution's witnesses. On Tuesday, he brought up Muniz's criminal past during testimony; the alleged victim's father has a past conviction for sex acts with an underage girl and was also sued for child support, according to records provided by Paparian.

The next hearing for McFarland will be an arraignment hearing on June 29. He will remain in custody unless he is able to come up with reduced bail amount of \$185,000.

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