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Ex-lockup manager gets a 10-year term in teen's sex abuse

Jury was deliberating sentence after trial's punishment phase ended.



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Ray Edward Brookins said he quit because of pornography.



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John Paul Hernandez former principal is awaiting trial.

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

Updated: 2:31 a.m. Saturday, April 24, 2010
Published: 10:32 p.m. Friday, April 23, 2010

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ODESSA — More than five years after a scandal broke that upended the state agency responsible for jailing juvenile criminals in Texas, a former jail administrator is headed to prison for 10 years.

Ray Edward Brookins, a former assistant superintendent at the Texas Youth Commission's West Texas State School, was convicted Thursday of sexually abusing a then-18-year-old inmate in 2004. He was convicted of two counts each of improper sexual activity with a person in custody and of having an improper relationship between an educator and student.

Brookins is one of two former school administrators accused of sexually abusing teenage inmates. Several top agency officials have resigned, and former Principal John Paul Hernandez awaits trial.

Authorities believe at least 13 boys were sexually abused. The case led to accusations of a cover-up and reports exposing lax medical care, beatings and a culture of retaliation against whistle-blowers. Lawmakers eventually ordered an overhaul of the system.

Brookins, who stood motionless as his sentence was read late Friday, was immediately handcuffed and escorted out of the courtroom by deputies.

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott said in a statement Friday that he was pleased with the verdict after so many years of delays in the case.

"We are finally one step closer to justice for the victims in this very disturbing case," Abbott said.

Rick Navarrete, one of Brookins' attorneys, said that they disagreed with the guilty verdict, but that the defense was pleased with the sentence.

"We're actually happy that the jury saw fit to take a moment and consider" the entire case, Navarrete said. He added that an appeal was planned.

Brookins could have been sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Several witnesses testified against Brookins, including the inmate he was convicted of molesting. They offered often lurid testimony, detailing late-night sexual encounters in offices or on darkened ball fields, the use of sex toys and pornography, and sexual advances they struggled to ignore.

Assistant Attorney General Ralph Guerrero said Brookins, who has also worked at Texas state prisons, abused his power from the time he became a jailer.

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"These kids needed a father figure, and he treated them like human sex toys," Guerrero said during his closing argument for the sentencing phase of the trial.

During the weeklong trial, prosecutors painted a picture of a jail administrator who used his role to target inmates for his sexual pleasure as well as physical mistreatment.

Brookins, who testified Friday before being sentenced, said he was brought to the remote jail in Pyote to ease "unrest" and fix "disarray" at the jail.

"I have never sexually abused any inmates," Brookins said adamantly when questioned by Guerrero.

Brookins said he resigned from his job shortly after Texas Ranger Brian Burzynski interviewed him in February 2005 only because he had hundreds of pornographic videos on the compound and felt it best to quit.

But Guerrero challenged him and said Brookins left because he knew he had been caught.

"You knew you had to get the hell out of Dodge, didn't you?" Guerrero said.

Earlier Friday, the inmate Brookins was convicted of abusing said the experience has altered his life forever.

"It's hard for me to open to a woman in a relationship," said the man, now in his 20s and a state prison inmate. "I don't have any friends. I really don't have a relationship with my family, except for my mom."

But Brookins had dismissed the abuse claims, saying one accuser was "just a real angry kid."

After the sentence was read, Burzynski struggled to keep his emotions in check. "This has been an emotional roller coaster from the start," he said. His report detailing the 2005 allegations wasn't acted on for two years.

Some of the teen inmates were threatened with retaliation, investigators said.

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