

Plea Bargain Agreement raises eyebrows

January 10, 2025



32 year old Dhruv Mehta, a Little Caesar's Crescent City restaurant manager pleaded guilty to having sexual intercourse with a 17 year old store employee earlier this year. Judge Robert Cochran presided over this troubling case and was palpably disturbed by the emotional delivered comments of victim and her parent

Nonetheless, Judge Cochran accepted the recommendations of the Del Norte Probation Department.

The original rape charge was negotiated down to Penal Code violation 261.5c, a felony, Unlawful Sexual Intercourse with a minor more than three years younger than the reported age of the assailant.

Convicted Mehta was immediately remanded to the Sheriff's Dept. to begin a 90 sentence which, per policy, will be reduced to 45 days.

The question begs to be asked: Was justice served?

The written victim statements from the child and father were powerful and profound. Fear, shame, confusion and humiliation were painfully evident in the child's statement to the Court. The father underscored the change in his daughter's behavior since the incident. The parent underscored his daughter's loss of innocence and the future impact on his child. The parent called Mehta a predator, a monster. The circumstances revealed how the employee was lured to the now-felon's residence under questionable circumstances where the illegal sex acts were committed. The testimony was unsettling.

Both the District Attorney and Mehta, through his attorney, agreed to the reduction in charges. Judge Cochran also had the opportunity to kibosh the Agreement but chose not to do so.

Other consequences for Mehta are:

- Victim is under a Criminal Protective Order. Felon Mehta may not make any contact with the minor and must distance himself by at least 100 yards.
- Mehta will be under Del Norte felony probation supervision for two years.
- Felon Mehta must register as a Tier One sex offender, an order which will endure for 10 years. Mehta must undergo a series of educational programs, administered by Probation and serve 140 hours of community service upon being released from jail custody.
- Felon Mehta must officially request written permission to leave Del Norte County and must report to Probation the 1st and 10th monthly.
- Felon Mehta may not own or have access to any weapons.
- \$1150 Civil fines issued to the defendant.
- A Civil case attorney observed the proceedings via ZOOM for a possible restitution case.
- A \$300 Court fine may be waived if felon Mehta completes all his programs within the prescribed time period.

The Triplicate called Chief Probation Officer Lonnie Reyman and District Attorney Katie Micks for comment on the case's outcome.

Reyman responded expediently with his comments. "Plea deals are a major part of dispensing justice. All parties agreed to the plea agreement. Probation takes no sides." Probation acts as the arbiter where it makes recommendations to the Court. Reyman stated that very few cases actually go to a jury and Del Norte is no different than the rest of America, on how it metes out justice. Despite the 6th Amendment right to have a jury of your peers judge one's guilt, "Plea bargaining is the reality."

DA Micks did not return the Triplicate's phone call; however, in past conversations with The Triplicate on plea bargaining, Micks has expressed satisfaction on her record in serving the Peoples' interests through plea bargaining

Micks cautioned the public on going to Court to have a jury of peers judge the defendant, stating the possibility of losing a case is very real, and the defendant may walk free with no consequences.

During calendar year 2023, the District Attorney oversaw some 1600 felonies. DA Micks went the jury route just eight times all last year. All other cases were handled by plea bargaining.

Lastly, during the Mehta case, his counsel requested immediate remand to Sheriff custody be delayed until February so felon Mehta could enjoy the Holidays. In rejection of that request, Judge Cochran's abrupt and

curt response was, “...there’s another family and young lady who may not enjoy Christmas this year (because of your client).

Have You lowered your eyebrow, yet?