

Beat: Miscellaneous

California cop charged for sharing nude photos of detained women

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USPA News - A California Highway Patrol (CHP) officer was charged Friday with two felony counts for stealing nude photographs from the cell phones of female detainees, prosecutors said, adding that two other officers who received the photos will not face charges. Officer Sean Harrington, 35, was charged in Contra Costa County Superior Court with two felony counts of unauthorized access to a computer and copying of computer data.

Harrington, if convicted on both charges, faces a maximum of three years and eight months in prison. Both charges stem from two separate incidents in August during which Harrington allegedly searched the phones of female detainees and forwarded their private photos to his own phone. The first incident occurred in Livermore on August 7 and involved a 19-year-old woman who had been arrested for felony Driving Under the Influence (DUI). While she was being treated at a local hospital, Harrington allegedly searched her phone and sent private photos from her cell phone to his. The second incident occurred on August 29 after Harrington arrested a 23-year-old woman in San Ramon, also for DUI. When she was released from the Martinez Detention Facility, the woman discovered that six explicit photos - which were stored on her iPhone - had been forwarded to Harrington. She then notified the district attorney's office. A search of Harrington's cellphone and computer showed that the officer forwarded the photos of both women to at least two other officers at the Dublin CHP Area office, which is just southeast of San Francisco. "Based on our review of the evidence gathered to date, the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office will not be filing criminal charges against any other CHP officer," the Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office said. "Should additional evidence later be obtained that an officer violated the law; he/she will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law." Avery Browne, the chief of the CHP Golden Gate Division, reiterated Friday that he was disappointed with Harrington's alleged behavior and said it does not reflect on the professionalism of other officers. He said the agency will continue its administrative investigation into the allegations and take "appropriate action," which may include dismissal. "As an organization we expect the highest level of integrity and moral strength from everyone in the California Highway Patrol, and there is no place in our organization for individuals who chose to manipulate the law and departmental policy for their person gain," Browne said. "His behavior does not reflect the professionalism of the thousands of members of the California Highway Patrol who pledge to provide indispensable safety, service, and security to the people of California." Browne, speaking at a late-night news conference on October 25, had said he was "disgusted" by the allegations of misconduct. "When I read the accounts and responses that were mentioned in the search warrant documents, the callousness and depravity with which these officers communicated about women is dehumanizing, horribly offensive, and degrading to all women," he said. Harrington previously admitted to investigators that he had stolen photos belonging to about "half a dozen" female arrestees over the past several years, adding that his conduct was part of an ongoing "game" among officers. Browne, however, has insisted that the misconduct was confined to the Dublin CHP Area office alone. In late June, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that law enforcement officers cannot search the cell phones of individuals when they are arrested if police do not have a search warrant to do so. Since the landmark ruling in favor of electronic privacy, officers are only allowed to examine a phone's physical aspects to eliminate any potential physical threats.

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