



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

FORMER WASATCH COUNTY DEPUTY SHERIFF ASSIGNED TO COUNTY CORRECTIONS FACILITY CHARGED WITH CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

INDICTMENT ALLEGES HE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED VICTIM ACTING UNDER COLOR OF LAW

SALT LAKE CITY – A federal grand jury returned a three-count indictment Wednesday charging Christopher Stein Epperson, age 33, of Heber City with deprivation of rights under color of law for alleged sexual misconduct in his capacity as a Wasatch County Deputy Sheriff assigned to the county's Department of Corrections as a jail guard.

The charges stem from conduct alleged to have happened in December 2009 and follow an investigation by the Utah Department of Public Safety and the FBI.

Two counts of the indictment charge Epperson with sexually assaulting an individual by committing or attempting to commit aggravated sexual abuse, depriving the victim of civil rights protections under the Constitution and laws of the United States. These counts, charged as

deprivation of rights under color of law, carry a potential penalty of any term of years up to life in prison and a \$250,000 fine per count.

Epperson also is charged with sexually assaulting the victim by touching her either directly or through her clothing. This count, also charged as deprivation of rights under color of law, carries a potential penalty of up to a year in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Epperson was taken into custody Wednesday afternoon. An initial appearance will be scheduled for Thursday.

Indictments are not findings of guilt. Individuals charged in indictments are presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty in court.

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Editor's Note: What does “color of law” mean? Law enforcement officers and other officials like judges, prosecutors, and security guards have been given tremendous power by local, state, and federal government agencies—authority they must have to enforce the law and ensure justice in our country. These powers include the authority to detain and arrest suspects, to search and seize property, to bring criminal charges, to make rulings in court, and to use deadly force in certain situations. Preventing abuse of this authority, however, is equally necessary to the health of our nation’s democracy. That’s why it’s a federal crime for anyone acting under “color of law” willfully to deprive or conspire to deprive a person of a right protected by the Constitution or U.S. law. “Color of law” simply means that the person is using lawful authority given to him or her by a local, state, or federal government agency. The FBI is the lead agency for investigating color of law cases.