



Rick Staly, Sheriff

FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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NEWS RELEASE

Date: Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Contact: Brittany Kershaw; (386) 586-2637; bkershaw@flaglersheriff.com

Charges Filed on Two Students for Assault after Making Threats to Harm Teacher **Sheriff's Office Recommends Enhanced Penalties as Hate Crime**

Two students at Flagler Palm Coast High School (FPC) were charged with Assault on Wednesday morning following an incident that began on Monday. School Administration notified School Resource Deputies on campus that a 16-year-old female and a 16-year-old male were using their school issued computers to communicate about harming a teacher.

The two students were brought to the dean's office accompanied by School Resource Deputies. The communication was reviewed and was found to include extremely racist language about a teacher, Mrs. Kimberley Lee, and comments between the subjects on plans to harm the teacher. Interviews with both students were conducted on Monday where both students claimed the comments were inappropriate jokes. The initial investigation was assigned to the Sheriff's Office Investigative Services Division and Domestic Homeland Security Section for follow-up.

On Tuesday investigators conducted an interview with the victim, Mrs. Lee, who reported to detectives that she believes the student is capable of harming her and that she has a well-founded fear after this communication was discovered. Mrs. Lee told detectives that she wishes to press charges to the fullest extent of the law.

Based on the completed investigation, FCSO detectives determined that the two students made intentional and unlawful threats to harm Mrs. Lee and in doing so created a well-founded fear that such violence was possible. Charges were forwarded to the 7th Circuit State Attorney's Office on Wednesday morning for the charge of Assault with an enhancement as a Hate Crime under Florida law for both students.

"More serious felony charges were explored but the facts of this case did not meet the required elements for a felony charge," said Chief Steve Brandt, Chief of Investigative Services. "Because this is a misdemeanor and is not an immediate arrest exception under Florida law, a physical arrest cannot be made so our only option was to file recommended charges with the State Attorney's Office."

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“I was appalled at the language these students were using and the threats made toward this teacher”, said Sheriff Rick Staly. “These racial tones have no place in our community. The Flagler County Sheriff’s Office has a zero tolerance policy on school threats. All threats will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated and appropriate charges will be made, but often these situations take time to investigate and review the evidence before determining a charge or making an arrest. It is not acceptable to claim you were ‘joking around’ when caught or to threaten anyone.”

“Flagler Schools relies on a variety of security procedures to include new front desk protocols, monitoring of electronic communications on our campuses as well as the ‘see something, say something’ campaign Sheriff Staly has promoted,” Flagler Schools Superintendent James Tager said. “We are appreciative of the security the Flagler County Sheriff’s Office provides all our campuses and our administration at Flagler Palm Coast High School continues to work with FCSO investigators in this particular case.”

FCSO’s Domestic Homeland Security staff are continuing to conduct threat assessments on these two students. Any school discipline for the two students will be determined by FPC and Flagler County School administration.

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