



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Press Release

WILLIAM SHEEHAN INCOMPETENT TO STAND TRIAL

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Statement of the Norfolk District Attorney's Office, September 13, 2013:

In 2012 the Foxboro Police requested the assistance of the Norfolk District Attorney's Office in the investigation of sexual assaults by William Sheehan, a former Boy Scout Leader, public school teacher, and coordinator of the local recreational swimming program. That investigation revealed that Sheehan had sexually assaulted as many as twenty-two children in Foxboro from the early 1960s through 1981. Additional information from an individual who had previously reported that Sheehan had sexually assaulted him in the late 1970's led Foxboro Police to re-open their investigation first initiated in early 1998 when that individual, who was then thirty-one years old, reported to Foxboro Police that Sheehan had indecently assaulted him eighteen years earlier. At that time Foxboro Police informed the Norfolk District Attorney's Office of this report and their initial investigation; no charges issued. The renewed investigation prompted by the additional information in 2012 led to the identification of the twenty-two victims now known to the Norfolk District Attorney's Office.

Sheehan left Massachusetts in 1981; therefore, prosecutions on some of the reported assaults were not time barred by the statute of limitations. In September 2012 the ongoing investigation led Foxboro Police and State Police detectives to go to the nursing home in Fort Myers, Florida where Sheehan resided to execute an arrest warrant. The Foxboro Police arrest warrants charged him with sexually assaulting three children in the late 1970's. Sheehan was physically and mentally incapacitated to the point that it was not practicable to arrest him.

Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey then sought and obtained a formal clinical competency evaluation by a Florida mental health professional who is recognized as an expert witness in Florida courts on competency issues. The legal standard for a defendant to be competent to stand trial in a criminal matter is that he must have sufficient present ability to consult with his lawyer with a reasonable degree of rational understanding and have a rational as well as factual understanding of the proceedings against him. Sheehan has been found not competent to stand trial due to advanced dementia and unable to be restored to competency by any known medical or therapeutic intervention. This finding renders a criminal prosecution unsustainable.

"The crimes Sheehan is accused of are predatory and extremely disturbing. The scope of the accusations and the violation of trust are absolutely shocking," District Attorney Morrissey said. "The determination that he is not fit to stand trial in no way diminishes the truthfulness and importance of the victims who have come forward to present their testimony. We are grateful for their courage. Speaking out today, even decades later, will hopefully make it safer for other victims to step forward and maybe even to help prevent such a terrible thing from happening to other children. By speaking out, each victim has made a tremendous difference."