

**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**71-year-old man sentenced to 15 years in prison for child molestation**  
**State vs. Walter Gary DeVault**

**May 23, 2022** – District Attorney Shannon Wallace announces that on March 2, 2022, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Walter Gary DeVault, 71, formerly of Woodstock, to 40 years with the first 15 years to be served in confinement in the state prison system. DeVault was convicted of child molestation following a three-day jury trial that ended on February 11, 2022. The jury deliberated for approximately one hour before coming to its unanimous decision.

Charges stem from allegations that DeVault molested a female child in Cherokee County when she was 9 and 10 years old. From 2016-2017, the defendant, who was a person trusted within the victim’s family, spent time alone with the child, taking her on outings. The defendant testified at trial that he considered the child his best friend and would often relay his unconditional love for her.

When the parents became concerned about DeVault’s relationship with their daughter, they cut off all contact with DeVault. The defendant continued to seek out the child and contact her, even delivering her letters he had written, which included disparaging comments about the child’s parents.

Two years later, the child disclosed the sexual abuse committed by DeVault to a family member, explaining that she was afraid he was going to come back to get her. In a forensic interview conducted by the Anna Crawford Children’s Center, the child said that the defendant had touched her, made her touch his genital area, and kissed her on the mouth.

During the investigation of this case, it was determined that the defendant had been in contact with other little girls around the same age. At trial, two other witnesses came forward and described similar incidents that occurred with children in another jurisdiction outside of Cherokee County.

“Walt DeVault presents as charming and charismatic and was easily able to gain the trust of others. The families in this case trusted him with their most precious gifts, their daughters. He used his position of trust to do sexually inappropriate things to a little girl in Cherokee County. When he lost his access to her, he sought out other little girls and began the process all over again,” said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper of the Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State.

At the sentencing hearing, the Cherokee County victim and her father provided victim impact statements to the Court. “I have experienced nightmares and post-traumatic stress,” the victim said in a prepared statement read during the hearing. “I cannot look at, smell, or hear certain things without getting scared and having anxiety. This has affected my daily life and has not only affected me but also my entire family....I now view all older men as creepy, and I am scared of what they will do.”

At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Baker sentenced DeVault to 40 years with the first 15 years to be served in confinement in the state penitentiary and the remainder to be served on probation. Upon his release from prison, DeVault can have no contact with the victims or her family members, is banished from Cherokee County, and must adhere to sex offender special conditions.

“The victim in this case said that when she disclosed this abuse, she felt like a weight was lifted because someone finally knew. It’s heartbreaking to think of the anxiety and pain this child has endured, all because of the sick behavior of a man she once adored,” said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. “Through this sentence, this defendant will likely spend the remainder of his life in prison, ensuring that no other little girls will suffer as this victim has suffered.”

This case was investigated by Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief ADA Katie Gropper of the Special Victims Unit, Office of the District Attorney.

### **Sexual Abuse of Children**

Child abusers often engage in a grooming process that allows them to perpetrate sexual abuse undetected. “Grooming” in the context of child sexual abuse is a manipulative process intended to secure the child’s silence. Common characteristics of the grooming process include targeting the child, gaining the child and caregiver’s trust, filling a need, using flattery and gifts, isolating the child, sexualizing the relationship, and maintaining control.

Children who have been groomed are often conflicted about their feelings for the abuser because he/she has methodically established a positive relationship with the child prior to introducing sexual touches. Children who have been groomed are also more likely to conceal the abuse and delay disclosing the abuse to others.

To report suspected child abuse, call Child Protective Services at 855-422-4453. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911.

*The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.*

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