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BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Former Woodstock High School chorus teacher pleads guilty to 2018 sexual assault of students**  
**State vs. Ryan Parker McKendrick**

**February 24, 2023** – Acting District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that on February 9, 2023, Ryan Parker McKendrick, 40, entered a negotiated guilty plea to nine counts of sexual assault of a student, specifically touching and groping six high school students under the age of 18.

Senior Judge C.J. Gober Jr. sentenced McKendrick to 20 years, with the first 3 years to serve in prison and the balance on probation under sex offender special conditions. He is forbidden to have contact with the victims or minors under the age of 18.

Charges stem from allegations of sexual contact involving high school girls in 2017 and 2018. In September 2018, Woodstock High School administration became aware of a concerning text conversation involving McKendrick and two female students. This set off an investigation into McKendrick, who had been the school's chorus teacher since 2007.

“When these crimes came to light, the girls were abundantly clear about what the defendant had done to them. Sadly, some members of the community and their peers discounted their experiences, even suggesting any touching was accidental. However, the facts showed that the defendant's actions were unlawful. He groomed not only these girls, but also everyone around him so that he could continue to engage in this troubling behavior,” said Assistant District Attorney Leyna Pope, Special Victims Unit, who prosecuted this case on behalf of the state. “It was a privilege to stand beside these girls as they finally got to address the man who abused them.”

Cherokee County School Police and Cherokee Sheriff's Office conducted the investigation, determining that many students had experienced similar behavior from this teacher.

“This former teacher used his position of authority to engage in inappropriate behavior including touching, groping, and sexual innuendo at a time when the victims were entrusted to his care as students. His betrayal and abuse of power caused long-term trauma that these young women are still working through to this day,” said Acting District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “These girls showed incredible strength and fortitude in confronting their abuser during the plea hearing. We are thankful that their satisfaction with this outcome has brought them closure.”

Standing before the court in support of the plea, eight victims delivered emotional impact statements describing how traumatizing the abuse was. They shared the betrayal they felt that a person they trusted and had known for years would treat them in this way. They described their continued feelings of self-doubt and insecurity, wondering if he treated them special as part of grooming them. They confided that they still struggle with trusting

anyone, especially those in positions of authority. They addressed the strength they felt in having the courage to speak before the court, and they said they were relieved that the defendant admitted to the charges by pleading guilty.

“It takes a very sick man to take advantage of vulnerable, under-aged girls in the ways that you did,” one victim said to the defendant during the plea hearing. “Today I let you go. And I hope it is the last time I will ever hear your name.”

Another victim spoke about hoping that this sentence will give the defendant time to reflect on his actions and change.

“Even if the defendant does not feel any remorse for their actions, I hope the time spent in a cell is a time spent on reflection. I hope these impact statements have helped the defendant realize that little comments and actions eventually turn into something much bigger. Now here we are, on top of a mountain the defendant created, a mountain me and other girls had to climb,” she said. “At the end of the day, it is up to the defendant to change. It is up to him to recognize the heavy mistakes made and prevent them from being repeated.”

### **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.

*This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and the Cherokee County School Police. Assistant District Attorney Leyna Pope, Special Victims Unit, Office of the District Attorney, handled the prosecution with the assistance of Inv. Jonathan McFarland, who is also with the Special Victims Unit. 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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