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DNA clears church elder

Judge throws out charges

By Jenna M. Carlotta
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Stafford, Conn.

Despite long-standing state claims that Matthew Deloatch molested a young mentally disabled girl, the church elder said he wasn't surprised Wednesday

when a prosecutor dropped the sexual-assault charges against him.

"It was just a matter of time before they threw it out," Deloatch, 55, said of his case. "I can get on with my life

now."

On the day jury selection was closed to begin for Deloatch's trial, prosecutor Christopher Peloni announced in Hartford Superior Court that the state

"cannot carry the burden of continuing the case."

The array of sexual-assault and risk-of-injury charges Deloatch faced were dropped and he walked free from the courtroom.

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Deloatch spent nearly eight months in jail

■ EXONERATED

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"I knew it was going to come out," Deloatch said from his Manchester home after the hearing. "It was just time. You've got to be patient, which I learned."

Bodyly told found on a pile of the girl's Sesame Street character underpants proved not to be his through DNA testing done last year. That admission began to weaken the case.

Inconclusiveness in the investigation and "credibility issues" with state witnesses also contributed to the dismissal, Peloni said Wednesday.

"It's unfortunate, but a lot of it comes down to 'he said, she said,'" the prosecutor concluded.

The state, however, can reopen the case if new evidence surfaces in the next 13 months.

"I think this is the appropriate decision," Deloatch's lawyer, Salvatore Bonanno, said in court.

He later said of Peloni: "I'm happy with what he did. He didn't seek the decision."

The girl told police Deloatch had molested her in his bedroom and in a bathroom at New Life Holy House of Prayer in East Hartford,

where he serves as an elder. She asserted she was between 9 and 10 years old when it happened.

In April 2006, Deloatch was arrested and charged with first-degree sexual assault, second-degree sexual assault, fourth-degree sexual assault, and three counts of risk of injury to a minor and first-degree unlawful restraint.

Then in May 2006, he was additionally charged with fourth-degree sexual assault and risk of injury to a child in Manchester, where the charges first came about.

A married father of six daughters,

Deloatch spent nearly eight months behind bars until he was able to post \$55,000 in bail bonds just two days before Christmas.

His release came on the heels of DNA testing of seminal fluid and other fluid found on the stained Sesame Street panties. Peloni told a judge in December 2006 that the semen sample didn't match Deloatch's.

The church elder said Wednesday he and his family are "very happy."

"More than anything we want people to know the truth," Deloatch said.