

Former Hartford officer sentenced to home confinement

By Kym Soper
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HARTFORD — A former Hartford police officer dodged jail time Monday, receiving a sentence of six months' home confinement for stealing nearly \$30,000 in pistol permit fees.

Tishay Johnson, 41, of Windsor must also complete three years of probation, 300 hours of community service, and continue with psychological therapy as part of the sentence handed down by U.S. District Court Judge Robert N. Chatigny.

Johnson also must pay back \$17,442.50 to the City of Hartford and \$11,984.25 to the state.

U.S. Attorney Chris Mattei argued for a jail sentence of six to 12 months, saying law-enforcement officials should be held to the same standard as other citizens to maintain the public's trust.

When questioned by the Police Department's Internal Affairs Division, Johnson admitted the

thefts, which took place over a long period of time, making it "more serious than a one-time lapse in judgment," Mattei told the judge.

There were "several hundred instances, driving home the fact that he knew what he was doing," Mattei argued.

Mattei, however, agreed with Chatigny that home confinement fit within the sentencing guidelines for this case.

According to Johnson's lawyer, Salvatore Bonanno, Johnson took the money because of a gambling addiction that developed after he was shot during an undercover operation. Bonanno cited Johnson's stellar history, saying probation would be a sufficient sentence.

A popular coach of youth sports in Windsor, Johnson, who resigned from the Police Department in January, had many letters of support submitted to the court, all describing him as a dedicated police officer, community member, husband, and father.

"Except for this one incident,

which is so aberrant to his behavior, he is always looking to help others," Bonanno said.

Johnson was wearing a bullet-proof vest when he was shot by a drug dealer in 2003, and while he wasn't seriously injured, the psychological and emotional toll was significant and he didn't receive the proper treatment at the time, his therapist, Christopher Penta, wrote in a letter to the court.

The 14-year police officer has survived thyroid cancer, had an abusive stepfather while growing up, and sustained post-traumatic stress from being shot and from discharging his weapon in another incident where a suspect was killed, Penta said, adding that forgoing treatment likely contributed to his compulsive gambling.

What's encouraging, Penta added, is that Johnson feels great shame and profound guilt over the incident and is "terrified of the effect" his behavior has had on his wife and children, providing a good

prognosis for change.

The emotional proceeding Monday was punctuated by the tearful reading of a letter by Johnson's 13-year-old daughter, Destiny, who told the judge that her father was "a wonderful caring person who wants to help people" and consistently motivated her to do her best in all walks of life.

"He made a mistake, and I can accept that because no one is perfect," she told Chatigny.

Johnson, a bodybuilder who wants to open a nutritional supplement store or gym after completing his sentence, said he didn't initially plan to speak, but after hearing his daughter's plea to the court told the judge, "I won't let you down if I get probation."

"This is a blemish on my life," he added, apologizing to the court and his family.

Chatigny said Johnson's past conduct weighed heavily in his favor. And while the traumatic stress of being shot or surviving

cancer and abuse didn't provide an "excuse" for his behavior, it did put things in perspective, Chatigny said, adding that the sentence is similar to what any ordinary citizen in the same situation would receive.

"When a police officer breaks the law, it's imperative the court respond in a stern manner to keep the public confidence in the legal system," he said while handing down the sentence. But "gambling addiction does cause people to do things they wouldn't otherwise do."