

Macomb County sheriff accused of sexually assaulting a woman

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Body

The Macomb County sheriff has been charged with raping a woman in a hotel while he was attending the Michigan Sheriffs' Association fall conference last month.

William Hackel, 57, was arraigned Wednesday on two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct. Each offense carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison.

"Conviction would almost certainly mandate some length of prison term," Prosecutor Larry Burdick told The Detroit News.

The charges stem from an investigation conducted by the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Police from a complaint made on Oct. 11, tribal police said. Tribal police conducted the investigation because the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort in Mount Pleasant where the attack allegedly occurred is on tribal property.

Hackel surrendered to authorities Wednesday afternoon.

Hackel, who has been the sheriff for 23 years, was released on a \$10,000 bond. A preliminary examination is scheduled for Tuesday.

The complaint was filed by a woman who alleges she was sexually assaulted in her hotel room at the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort, the Isabella County Prosecutor's Office said in a written statement.

Investigators interviewed more than two dozen people during the five-week investigation. The woman reported the alleged attack shortly after she said it occurred, Burdick said.

Hackel was not immediately questioned by police.

More than 100 representatives from 60 of Michigan's 83 counties attended the three-day event to discuss law enforcement standards and hear speakers. Hackel's wife also was at the conference.

Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga, a close friend and political ally of Hackel, called Wednesday "the saddest day of my political career." But he said he believe the judicial system will work to find the truth.

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"I'm perfectly torn in half on this," he told The Macomb Daily of Mount Clemens. "Bill Hackel is my friend, but I also don't believe police or prosecutors would bring forward a charge unless it's being brought in good faith."

Hackel was not at the sheriff's department office Wednesday evening. His home telephone number is not published. There was no answer at the office of Hackel's attorney, James Howarth.

Howarth had said earlier that Hackel did not intend to step down and urged people not to form a hasty opinion.

But he told the Detroit Free Press on Tuesday: "This could end his career."

Hackel, who has a son who works for the sheriff's department, was elected sheriff in 1976 when he was 35 years old.

About two years ago, Republicans flew Hackel, a Democrat, to Washington, D.C., to try to persuade him to run against U.S. Rep. David Bonior, a Mount Clemens Democrat, the Detroit Free Press reported. He refused.

A night earlier, Hackel was honored by the March of Dimes of Southeast Michigan as "Volunteer of the Year," The Macomb Daily reported.

Hackel is serving his sixth four-year term. He has easily won most of his races.

Graphic

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