

Teacher who had sex with boy was let off easy, some complain

They say a man would have gotten a harsher sentence

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SEATTLE — Some child advocates are angered by the six-month jail sentence given a teacher who had sex with a 13-year-old boy, and say a man convicted of the same crime wouldn't get such "a slap on the wrist."

Mary Kay LeTourneau was sentenced Friday for two counts of second-degree child rape. She had pleaded guilty in August and acknowledged having a sexual relationship with the boy and giving birth to his daughter.

She was also ordered into a three-year sex offender treatment program and is barred from contact with the boy, who is now 14, and their daughter, who is about 6 months old.

The boy's mother is caring for the baby.

"The facts are that as a teacher, she used one of her students to satisfy her sexual desires. You just don't do that," said Patrick Gogerty, executive director of Childhaven, a Seattle agency for neglected and abused children. "Are there rules governing this? I don't think it should include a slap on the wrist. It should be more than this."

Rebecca Roe, who prosecuted sex offenders in King County for 18 years, said LeTourneau may be getting a break because she doesn't look like most people's idea of a sex offender. A well-respected teacher, LeTourneau was a married mother of four when she started the relationship.

"What it says is that with people who don't look like bad people or don't look like child abusers, we're

going to cut them some slack," Roe said.

Many sex offenders are sentenced to treatment instead of jail time — more than half of first offenders in Washington state, according to David Gehrke, LeTourneau's lawyer.

"Some people will say that Mary was treated special because she is a woman, because she is successful, because she is attractive," Gehrke said. "There are critics after every jury verdict."

Comparable cases in Washington are rare, but two recent cases involving male teachers and female students resulted in prison terms.

Last year, a junior high school teacher was sentenced to nearly four years in prison for having sex with a 15-year-old girl. He was convicted of third-degree rape of a child, third-degree child molestation and communicating with a minor for immoral purposes. In 1995, a former middle school hall monitor was sentenced to three years for third-degree child rape — having sex with a 14-year-old girl.

"It sounds to me like she fared pretty well," Karil Klingbeil, director of social work at Seattle's Harborview Medical Center, said of LeTourneau. "I doubt that had there been a male perpetrator, it would have resulted in the same sentence."

But some people defended King County Superior Court Judge Linda Lau, who rejected prosecutors' recommendation that LeTourneau spend 6½ years in jail.

"It's the first offense, and she has had an absolutely clean record. She hasn't victimized a number of children over time," said John LaFond, a Seattle University law professor who monitors cases involving sex offenders. "I don't think the sentence is out of the norm. This is the kind of person for whom treatment can prove effective."