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Deadwood commissioner charged with harassment, warrant issued

Pioneer staff reports
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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story contains lewd content which may not be appropriate for all readers.

DEADWOOD — A new warrant seeking the arrest of a Deadwood commissioner was issued Monday.

The warrant, issued for the arrest of Blake Joseph, 39, came the same day he pleaded no contest and was fined for careless driving and a subsequent failure to appear charge, stemming from a July 2024 incident during the annual Days of '76 parade.

Joseph was charged on Friday with a single count of making threatening or harassing phone calls in which he, “did contact another person with intent to terrorize, intimidate, threaten, harass, or annoy by using obscene or lewd language or by suggesting a lewd or lascivious act,” according to the warrant.

This is a Class 1 misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

He faces an alternative charge of making threatening or harassing phone calls in which he, "did contact another person and in so doing, intentionally caused to be displayed as caller identification, a fictitious or misleading name or telephone number."

Joseph did not return a phone call or email by press time.

According to court documents, Sgt. Dustin Schumacher, of the Lawrence County Sheriff's Office, met with the alleged male victim regarding alleged harassment he received from Joseph.

The alleged victim was in the process of getting a divorce, and his wife was dating Joseph at the time. The alleged victim said he received texts from Joseph's known phone number, as well as from a number he did not recognize. Schumacher confirmed with the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation, that the unknown number was a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) number, which are not registered to a person.

Court reports indicate that the alleged victim was sure the unknown number came from Joseph based on personal information in the messages. The messages mention a contact the Joseph and the alleged victim had in a hot tub at The Lodge at Deadwood. The alleged victim said at that time he did not know Joseph but Joseph knew the alleged victim's children.

According to Schumacher's report, Joseph during questioning denied owning or using a device or app that would spoof his number; however, he allegedly acknowledged the content and tone of the messages, as the conversation appeared familiar and consistent with a past heated exchange between the two. Joseph repeatedly said he did not recall sending the texts and was confused about the origins of the number. Schumacher reported that Joseph also alternated between denying knowledge of the phone and stating, "I don't know," or "I don't remember."

The three messages quoted in court documents from the VOIP number read:

"When you came to me that day in the hot tub confessing ur sad soul"

"I had just nutter in ur wife"

"We laughed about numerous times"

Schumacher reported the VOIP messages refer to the alleged victim's child by a specific nickname used by the family.

A text from Joseph's known phone number then refers to the child by the same nickname. That text allegedly starts with the sentence, "This is Commissioner Blake Joseph."

In an unrelated issue, Deadwood Mayor Charlie Struble-Mook addressed Joseph's use of his title in unofficial capacities after he announced a \$30 million lawsuit on Sept. 19 against the Lead-Deadwood School District, as well as school officials and other people for, "knowingly disseminating false, malicious, and reputationally destructive allegations without evidence." Struble-Mook said the statement did not reflect the position of the city and were made solely on Joseph's behalf. She also advised all commissioners to refrain from using their title in any capacity beyond the scope of formal actions or matters authorized under the official business of the city of Deadwood.

According to court reports, the alleged male victim repeatedly responded to the VOIP number, telling the sender to stop contacting him. During his meeting with Schumacher, the alleged victim blocked the number.

On July 7, Schumacher met with Joseph.

Schumacher's report indicates that Joseph denied initiating communication with the alleged victim and said any prior interaction was in response to the alleged victim contacting him first. Joseph claimed that the alleged victim repeatedly contacted him through unsolicited communication and social media posts. Joseph also claimed the alleged victim violated parenting terms by withholding their children beyond scheduled dates.

Schumacher's report indicates that Joseph referenced a Facebook post allegedly containing defamatory statements about him, which had been widely shared. Joseph also indicated a defamation lawsuit was underway and the alleged victim's statements about him caused significant professional and reputational damage as well as a loss of business.

A search of court records at the federal and state level did not indicate a civil lawsuit had been filed by Joseph as of Wednesday afternoon.

During Schumacher's question, Joseph then allegedly continued on a topic not directly relating to the messages, and said at the end of the conversation, "Regardless, I know that this heated conversation did happen by me." Schumacher wrote in his report that this was an admission he sent the messages.

According to court reports, Joseph offered to provide screenshots of the alleged victim's Facebook posts, text exchanges, and calls. He did show Schumacher screenshots of the Facebook posts but would not show him the text messages or phone calls.

The following day, Schumacher received an email from Joseph according to court documents. The email allegedly contained screen shots from the alleged victim's Facebook page about an incident at the school in which children were reportedly made uncomfortable by Joseph's presence as well as a post in which the alleged victim apparently shared a Black Hills Pioneer article about a warrant being issued for Joseph. In one of the comments, the alleged victim allegedly makes a reference to Ted Bundy, a convicted serial killer.

Joseph offered further, "documentation, including screenshots, witness names, or dates of these interactions." As of July 14, Schumacher reported he had not received any other communication from Joseph.

Schumacher wrote in his report that, based on the information he received, the messages from Joseph to the alleged victim, the annoying and obscene nature, and the alleged admission from Joseph that he sent the texts, that he requested the Lawrence County State's Attorney pursue charges.

Judge Chad Callahan appeared to sign the warrant for Joseph's arrest, set a \$500 unsecured bond, and stipulated that Joseph have no contact with the alleged victim.

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