

NEWS

Chauvin pleads guilty to U.S. charges in Floyd’s death

By Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs
NEW YORK TIMES COMPANY

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Derek Chauvin pleaded guilty Wednesday to a federal charge that he used his position as a Minneapolis police officer to violate George Floyd’s constitutional rights, a move expected to extend Chauvin’s time in prison beyond a decadeslong sentence for murdering Floyd.

Chauvin, 45, pleaded guilty in the U.S. courthouse in St. Paul, an appearance that was most likely among the longest periods he has spent outside a prison cell since a jury found him guilty of second-degree murder in April. Since then, he has been held in solitary confinement in Minnesota’s only maximum-security prison, where he is allowed out of his 10-foot by 10-foot cell for one hour a day.

A federal prosecutor said that as part of a plea agreement reached with Chauvin, prosecutors would ask a judge to sentence him to 25 years in prison, a term that would be served in federal prison.



Cedric Hohnstadt / Associated Press

In this courtroom sketch, attorney Eric Nelson, right, speaks to U.S. District Judge Paul Magnuson during a hearing where Derek Chauvin, center, pleaded guilty to a federal charge of violating George Floyd’s civil rights.

The sentence would run concurrent to the state sentence of 22 1/2 years for murder, meaning the guilty plea Wednesday would add about 21/2 years to his sentence. Chauvin appeared in court wearing an orange jumpsuit and, seated next to his attorney, answered a judge’s questions about whether he understood the terms of the

agreement.

Asked how he wanted to plead, Chauvin replied, “At this time, guilty, your honor.”

When a judge sentenced Chauvin to prison for murder in June, Chauvin appeared to refer to a potential plea deal with federal prosecutors during his condolences to Floyd’s family, saying that he

hoped future events would give the family “some peace of mind.”

In pleading guilty to the federal charge, Chauvin, who is white, admitted he had violated the constitutional rights of Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, to be free from unreasonable seizures, which include unreasonable force from a police officer. Chauvin had

knelt on Floyd’s neck for 9 1/2 minutes in May 2020 as a handcuffed Floyd lay face down on a South Minneapolis street corner.

Chauvin’s guilty plea will most likely add to the time he serves in prison. A judge will ultimately decide how much more time he spends in prison. Many legal experts said the federal government’s case was

strong, and a conviction at trial could have resulted in a life sentence. Chauvin may now be able to complete his sentence in a federal prison, which is generally considered to be safer and could separate Chauvin from prisoners he may have arrested.

The plea will also spare Chauvin, Floyd’s family and Minneapolis residents from the specter of an additional trial, though there are still several more legal proceedings related to Floyd’s death.

Floyd was a grandfather, a former rapper and a security guard who had lost his job at a nightclub when it closed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The harrowing footage of him gasping for air beneath an impassive Chauvin ignited protests in cities around the world, and led to the firing and arrest of Chauvin and three other officers at the scene.

Federal prosecutors have charged the three other officers – Thomas Lane, J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao – with violating Floyd’s civil rights in a case that is expected to go to trial in January.

HAIR

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allows all students to wear their hair long, a district spokesperson said in a statement.

When confronted by parents and civil rights groups this fall, board members repeatedly declined to reconsider the policy.

Then in October, the ACLU of Texas, the ACLU Women’s Rights Project and the law firms Ahmad, Zavitsanos, Anaiapakos, Alavi & Mensing P.C. and Susman Godfrey LLP sued the Magnolia ISD on behalf of six boys and one nonbinary student saying the students had experienced irreparable harm as a result of violations of Equal Protection and Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the

basis of sex.

Lawyers said schools unevenly enforced the rule across the district, including, for example, game day photographs showing several high school football players allowed to wear their hair long.

Chief U.S. District Judge Lee Rosenthal promptly ruled the gender-based hair policy could not be enforced while the case moved forward, finding it was likely Magnolia was violating the students’ constitutional rights.

Students and parents of students impacted by the policy asked the school board on multiple occasions to halt the policy, and on Monday night the board voted to revoke it.

“Students and families in Magnolia ISD have fought hard for this victory and can finally celebrate

that the district’s dress code will no longer punish students based solely on gender,” said attorney Brian Klosterboer, of the ACLU of Texas, which wrote nearly 500 other Texas school districts with similar dress codes prior to filing the lawsuit, notifying them they were in violation of the law if they kept them in place.

“In the wake of this decision, more school districts across the state are updating similarly outdated and unlawful policies,” he said. “We are heartened that they understand how vital it is that no school district subject students to dress codes that impose gender stereotypes.”

Klosterboer said he expects the students to file motions in the the coming days reflecting that there is no longer a difference of

opinion on the matter.

Parents involved in the lawsuit said they were thrilled their children can focus on school, activities and friends rather than worrying about their haircuts.

“We started the school year off excited to start a new school,” said Danielle Miller, whose child identifies as nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns. “But by the second day of school, Tristan’s school year was derailed by a school district that took away Tristan’s freedom to express themselves.”

Miller said her family is grateful for this outcome, but “for more than the obvious reasons.”

“As a mother, I saw my child bloom and stand up for their rights, no matter how hard people pushed them down,” she said. “I

was able to teach Tristan lessons that they will always remember and help them navigate through tougher situations as they get older.”

Victoria Dix said her nephew Connor, a sophomore on the tennis team at Magnolia West High School, quit attending his first year at the school when he learned about the hair policy.

“When we allowed him to grow his hair out, it severely boosted his self confidence. He opened up, he became more outgoing, his whole demeanor changed, because he had that one little thing he could control on his own.”

“So when the school told us that Connor was going to have to cut his hair, he came home completely devastated,” Dix said. His 17-year-old brother,

who wears his hair short, continued the year at Magnolia West uninterrupted, while 15-year-old Connor opted for home school rather than an alternative disciplinary program.

Connor returned to his high school campus after the federal judge issued an injunction.

He resumed playing for the school tennis team, returned to his regular classes and starting to make friends.

“He has a new girlfriend,” his aunt said. “It’s a complete turnaround. He’s a regular teenager. His father and I have noticed a huge difference. He’s a lot more cheerful ... his self confidence is improving. He’s having friends over to the house. ... He’s thrilled.”

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12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS Counseling Center of Montgomery County

Children and youth under Children’s Protective Custody often feel hopeless, neglected and not valuable. The Counseling Center of Montgomery County has served the community through contracts with the court to offer mental health services to individuals in need of extra support and guidance through a challenging situation for 15 years. Rebecca Smith, founder of The Counseling Center, has a passion to serve the youth in our county and since 2008 her team of 30 counselors have volunteered time to heal the youth caught up in the CPS system.

“I expanded to a group practice in October 2011 so we could do more for our community,” Smith said. “Revenue from my counseling business has helped fund my work with youth combined with my own personal funds for nearly 14 years. In July 2020, with an increased need to serve the youth across the state, Love Heals Youth was founded.”

Over 55,000 children under 18 are in the foster care system in Texas. Eighty percent of foster youth suffer from trauma. Love Heals Youth is a free, intensive therapy for foster youth residing in group homes and Children Without Placement. Love Heals Youth also provides training for the staff in group homes to ensure they have the tools to modify behavioral issues with the children they serve.

Rebecca shouts her mantra for all to hear. “Through LOVE, we HEAL! Our counseling program will help foster care youth rewrite and repurpose their trials and tribulations so they can find accep-

tance for the present and find freedom from the past. In time, LOVE will HEAL all wounds.”

Texas has been in a decade long federal lawsuit resulting in a loss of 2,200 beds since January 2020. Love Heals Youth counselors meet the foster youth at the group homes to do individual and group-based services which provides an added layer of accountability to ensure the kids are receiving quality care. In 2020, Love Heals Youth provided over 400 counseling sessions to youth at no cost. Children in Montgomery County served by Love Heals Youth are often placed from other counties without anyone visiting them from outside of the group home other than their counselors or a CPS caseworker.

As a 501©3 nonprofit organization they have a Board of Directors and can receive funding from grants. Love Heals Youth received their first grant from the Apricity Foundation on in November and hosted their first fundraiser on Nov. 20. All of the proceeds will fund mental health services for foster youth. As they continue to grow there is hope for a brighter tomorrow for the youth in CPS custody in our community.

Love Heals Youth looks to 2022 to offer supportive services to Family Promise of Montgomery County, God’s Garage, Angel Reach and group counseling for Yes to Youth, Montgomery County Youth Services. Since 2017 the organization has provided services to Access Builds Children.

“One of my clients was a young woman with an exceptionally long history of sexual and emotional abuse. During our time

together, we navigated what an age-appropriate and safe relationship looked like for her, self-respect, how to feel like she was worth more than just her body, and how to love even the parts of herself that reminded her of her abuser,” said one of the Love Heals Youth counselors.

“She would often ask me to take walks with her, so she could have some privacy from the younger children in the group home. She loved to swing on the swing set, something she said she had stopped doing when she “had to grow up.” While we only worked together for two months, she invited me to attend her hearings, and she still holds a big place in my heart.”

Youth in CPS desperately need supportive, loving counseling services. Love Heals Hope is a solution. Get involved by emailing Rebecca Smith Rebecca@Counseling-CenterMoCo.com to learn more about the program.

“Every foster kid deserves a village and needs a village. The pain, anxiety, fear that plagues them is heartbreaking. Their suicide rates are worse than veterans. My goal is to serve our foster youth across the state and bring them mental health services to address the trauma,” Smith said.

Connect with Love Heals Youth by following their Facebook page: www.facebook.com/LoveHealsYouth, leaving a message on their phone at 936-760-1880, or visiting their website www.LoveHealsYouth.com.

Contributed by Margie Taylor



Jason Fochtman / Staff photographer

Love Heals Youth founder Rebecca Smith speaks about her nonprofit, which offers free counseling to kids in foster care system homes and behavioral training and support to the staff members.

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