

# Foster's Daily Democrat

NEWS

## Former female inmate eager to testify against Strafford County guard in sex assault case

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BARRINGTON — Jennifer Duckworth said she has spent years trying to get someone to listen to her, to believe [her story of sexual abuses by a prison guard](#), and now that he has been indicted, she can't wait to testify in court.

"I have been ready to testify since the beginning," said Duckworth. "It blows my mind that he was never indicted when this first came to the state's attention. If it were anyone else, you or me, we would already be in jail. I can't wait. I am so excited. It is about time."



Jennifer Duckworth's allegations of sexual misconduct in the Strafford County jail are on record in county sheriff's investigative documents. *Deb Cram*

## **What is Strafford County corrections officer charged with?**

Patrick Shaeffer, 42, a former guard at the Strafford County House of Corrections, is facing criminal charges for allegedly using his position of authority over female inmates to solicit sexual favors in exchange for small amenities such as extra peanut butter.

Shaeffer was indicted on eight felony counts this month by a Strafford County grand jury. All the charges allege Shaeffer, formerly of Old Turnpike Road in Nottingham, used his position of authority over women inmates to coerce sexual favors.

Three charges are Class A aggravated felonious sexual assault felonies, carrying a potential prison term of 7.5-15 years, and the other five are Class B felonies of felonious sexual assault and attempted felonious sexual assault, carrying a potential sentence of 3.5-7 years. If convicted, the sentences can be served consecutively or concurrently at the discretion of the court. If convicted of all charges, Shaeffer faces up to 80 years in prison. The indictments are for allegations of abuse in 2019 and 2020.



Jennifer Duckworth's allegations of sexual assaults and sexual misconduct when she was an inmate at the Strafford County jail in 2020 are corroborated by women interviewed by investigators, as well as the alleged perpetrator, who has now been indicated on sex assault charges. *Deb Cram*

The case came to the public eye in April this year after Duckworth, one of the women involved, spoke to [Foster's Daily Democrat](#), frustrated her allegations were seemingly going nowhere. She provided sheriff department interviews that indicate as many as 10 women were assaulted and interviews with Shaeffer where he admitted he did some of the things alleged.

## **Civil suit will follow criminal case**

Duckworth is being represented by attorney Neil Nicholson, of Nicholson Law Firm in Portsmouth. He said he represents her and will represent any of the other women coming forward if they want him to. Both he and Duckworth said they had no idea the indictments had finally come through until seeing a story this week in Foster's Daily Democrat.

"I believe these women have both federal and state (civil) claims that can be brought," said Nicholson. "We will decide at the appropriate time (following the criminal case) whether to bring them in state or federal court. We have the option here."

Nicholson said he finds the allegations more than disturbing.

The allegations stated in the indictments are sickening," he said. "Ms. Duckworth and the other women who have come forward to disclose what was done to them have shown incredible courage. Pursuing accountability through the justice system is not always the easiest path, and we should all acknowledge their bravery."

Duckworth said that she started filing complaints and looking for corroborating documents before she was released from jail in February. In response, she claims she was put in segregation, preventing her from talking with other inmates.

"I was in there for 23 hours a day for four months until my release," she said. "I had nothing but time, so I kept looking for information on how to proceed. I read The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) handbook."

Strafford County Administrator Ray Bower said Shaeffer is no longer an employee of the county and that they cannot comment for legal reasons.

Shaeffer is currently living in Texas, according to Carroll County Attorney Keith Blair. He has been informed of the charges and is scheduled to appear in Strafford County Superior Court for an arraignment on Thursday, Nov. 9.

Duckworth freely admits she made mistakes in her life. She said she is working to get her life back. She is trying to regain custody of her daughter, is seeking to have her license reinstated and to find good housing for her and her child.

"I do weekly counseling," she said. "I did peer counseling through SOS. I will not do anything to give anyone a reason to send me back. Look what happened last time."

Source: <https://www.fosters.com/story/news/2023/11/02/ex-female-inmate-eager-to-testify-in-strafford-county-sex-assault-case/71392858007/>