



Outrage over video of judge beating daughter

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Aransas County officials and Rockport police are reviewing a video recently posted on YouTube that shows a county court-at-law judge beating his teenage daughter with a belt and cursing her as his now-former wife looked on.

"Obviously, it is a very disturbing video. We in my office as well as everyone on earth is taking a look at it, at this time," said County Attorney Richard Bianchi, who confirmed that the man wielding the belt in the video is County Court-at-Law Judge William Adams.

The seven-minute, 35-second video is dated 2004 and was purportedly posted by the judge's daughter, Hillary Adams, who was being punished for acquiring music and games on Internet sites that her parents disapproved of, according to a note attached to it.

As of Wednesday morning, it had gone viral, being viewed more than half a million times and sparking discussion about the use of social media to disclose the abuse.

The video shows a man in a T-shirt repeatedly striking a teenage girl with a belt and commanding her to "bend the (expletive) over."

A woman is heard going along with the beating, at one point shouting, "You turn over like a 16-year-old and take it, like a grown woman!"

The note accompanying the video said Hillary Adams suffered from ataxic cerebral palsy that fueled a passion for technology that was forbidden by her father's "backward" views.

It urges compassion for the wife, who has since left the marriage.

"Judge William Adams is not fit to be anywhere near the law system if he can't even exercise fit judgment as a parent himself," the note says.

The judge did not immediately return a call left at his office. A Corpus Christi television news organization, KRIS-TV, quoted him admitting that he was the man in the video and saying, "It happened years ago. ... I apologized."

The station also quoted Hillary Adams saying she published the video after sitting on it for seven years because "his harassment was getting really bad."

Hillary Adams, who now lives and works in San Antonio, did not immediately return messages sent to her via Facebook.

A Twitter user, “@shoefallcosmos,” who claims to be Hillary, declined interview requests from news outlets “if we have not already spoken.”

“Please be patient,” she posted around 2 p.m. Wednesday. Earlier in the day, the same Twitter user expressed concern for Judge Adams, stating, “I’m feeling some regret for publishing the video because to ruin my own father is heavy indeed. But I really want him to seek help.”

Although it has now been posted by many YouTube users, what appears to be the original video was shared online Oct. 27, according to the website. The YouTube user, “shoehedgie,” had previously posted several other videos since she joined the video sharing site in 2006, including homemade videos of a female — first a young girl, then later a teen and an adult — playing the piano. Captions identify her as Hillary Adams.

The video of the beating has spawned at least four Facebook pages, including “Prosecute Judge Adams” and “Don’t Re-elect Judge Adams.” Thousands of comments to it have been posted, sharing personal stories of child abuse and blasting the judge, who has three years left in his term. Several urged viewers to file complaints with the Aransas County Sheriff’s Office.

In a prepared statement, County Judge Burt Mills Jr. said the matter is “under review” by Rockport police, and he asked the public to refrain from calling county offices about it.

“Judge Adams remains on the bench” and has agreed to let a visiting judge hear any cases involving children for at least the next week, said Bianchi, the county attorney, who prosecutes misdemeanor cases. “When the police conduct their investigation, and if they bring anything, we’ll review it, and consider the statutes of limitations.”

Mary Walker, a spokeswoman for Texas Child Protective Services, said the agency was aware of the video, was investigating and “will take appropriate steps.”

The executive director of the Texas Commission on Judicial Conduct, which oversees judges in Texas, would not confirm that the agency was receiving complaints about Adams.

“We can’t confirm we’ve received any complaints or are investigating any judge,” Executive Director Seana Willing said.

Child abuse experts said it’s not clear whether the video will result in a criminal charge, though the case shows the impact of social media. The daughter “outed” the violence via YouTube, and the vast online community is pillorying the judge.

“Ten years ago, we wouldn’t have ever considered somebody disclosing through social media,” said Robert Bell, children’s justice coordinator for Maricopa County, Ariz. and a spokesman for Childhelp Inc. “But obviously, this has spread, and it’s brought it to the attention of the media, it’s brought it to the attention of law enforcement.”

David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire, said corporal punishment by parents is legal in all 50 states, and Texas is a state where it is still prevalent.

But a video such as this exposes what may go on behind closed doors in many homes, he said, and the reaction to it speaks for itself.

“I am encouraged by the fact that people are talking about this,” Finkelhor said. “I do think it certainly provides some fuel for people like myself who want to point out that the permission that we give parents to use corporal punishment on their children does make it much more difficult to sanction people who go over the line.”

Staff Writer John MacCormack contributed to this report. Lynn Brezosky reported from the Express-News bureau in Brownsville.