

CLALLAM COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Shelton Man Sentenced to over 11 years for Six Domestic Violence Charges

Clallam County Superior Court Cause No.: 21-1-00149-05

Clallam County Superior Court Judge Brent Basden sentenced Benjamin Hickson of Shelton to 133 months for six felony, domestic violence-related convictions, including assault in the second degree by strangulation, tampering with a witness, and four counts of felony violation of a no-contact order. A Clallam County jury found Hickson guilty on December 2, 2021 following a three-day trial.

On May 21, 2021, the mother of Hickson's youngest child called 9-1-1 and stated that Hickson had strangled her. Officer Jackson Vandusen arrived and saw that the victim had red marks on her neck and petechiae in her left eye. Later, PAPD Officer Michael Johnson had contact with the victim and noticed that her voice was noticeably raspier than when he had previously seen her. In addition to telling officers that Hickson had strangled her, the victim showed Officer Vandusen a letter in which Hickson apologized for "putting hands" on the victim. In a subsequent statement, Hickson admitted to Officer Vandusen that he authored the letter, but said it was referencing a previous incident. Hickson also admitted to putting his hands on the victim in an audio message he sent her that same day over Facebook. Officer Vandusen arrested Hickson and booked him into the Clallam County Jail. At his first appearance in court the next day, Judge Brent Basden of the Clallam County Superior Court imposed a Domestic Violence No-Contact Order restraining Hickson from contacting the defendant.

While awaiting trial, Hickson talked to another man using the jail phone system and tried to get the man to reach out to the victim, whom he gave the alias "Sunny," via Facebook. The victim in fact had a Facebook account under that alias. Hickson told the man, "I need her back on the team, bro." About one week later, Hickson was able to connect with the victim directly using a "Chirp" device, which is an older smartphone the jail provides to inmates so they can send text messages to friends and family while incarcerated. Hickson and the victim both used the "Sunny" alias in the text messages, although Hickson did use her real name in a couple of the messages. Hickson also discussed what the victim should tell the courts and the prosecutor about what happened in the case. Hickson and the victim had several text conversations between June 2 and June 20, 2021. At trial, the victim's testimony was largely consistent with what Hickson had told her to say in the messages.

“Hickson’s conviction and sentence demonstrates domestic violence offenders will be held accountable not only when they assault their partners, but that tampering with witnesses and interfering with the administration of justice will only make their situation worse,” said Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Steve Johnson. Johnson recommended a sentence of 22 years at the hearing. In his recommendation, Johnson pointed out that Hickson has six previous adult felony convictions, including for intimidating a witness, intimidating a public servant, and robbery in the second degree. Hickson also has 14 previous domestic violence convictions for violating no-contact orders and seven convictions for assault, including two for domestic violence assault. “Hickson’s violent criminal history goes back 20 years and shows no sign of abating,” Johnson wrote to the Court. “Only a lengthy prison sentence will protect the public.”

Office Information

The Clallam County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office employs over 25 people, including 14 attorneys. Clallam County, which includes Forks, Port Angeles and Sequim, has an approximate population of 78,000.

The Criminal Division represents the state and the county in criminal matters in the Clallam County District and Superior Courts. The Criminal Division is responsible for prosecuting all felonies in Clallam County and all misdemeanors in unincorporated areas of Clallam County as well as the Cities of Port Angeles and Sequim.

The Civil Division acts as the law firm representing the County and its agencies. The Civil Division advises and represents all of the County's elected officials and departments on a myriad of complex legal matters. The range of legal representation provided by this unit is expansive and covers virtually every aspect of civil practice.

The Child Support Division is wholly funded by and represents the Division of Child Support of the State of Washington. The Support Division carries out judicial establishment of paternity and child support, enforcements for failure to pay court-ordered child support, and modifications to existing child support orders. The Support Division also represents the State of Washington in collection actions on parents owing a duty of support.

For more information call:

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