

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, June 25, 2024.

A listener advisory on this first story. It may contain things that may be triggering to some listeners!

From the *Peninsula Daily News*: A former emergency department physician was sentenced to 179 days in jail for assaulting six women while they were in his care at Olympic Medical Center in 2021 and 2022. Judge Simon Barnhart on Monday followed recommendations of Michele Devlin, Clallam County chief criminal deputy prosecuting attorney, and ordered Josiah Hill to serve six concurrent sentences of 180 days in jail with credit for one day served. Hill also will pay \$500 to the state's Victim Penalty Assessment program and \$200 in court costs.

Barnhart also prepared no-contact orders for each of the six women. Hill pleaded guilty to six counts of fourth-degree assault with sexual motivation. The charge was a significant reduction from those he originally faced: six counts of indecent liberties as a health care provider with one count containing a special allegation of a vulnerable victim and one count of second-degree rape with special allegations of a vulnerable victim.

Devlin and Jared Ausserer, Hill's attorney, reached a plea agreement in May that dropped the felony charges against Hill to gross misdemeanors. The agreement eliminated the need for a jury trial, which had been slated to start Monday and was estimated to last between four and five weeks. Devlin said her office sought a plea deal that was appropriate, fair, and informed by trauma-informed prosecution practices that considered the impact that a jury trial, public scrutiny, and the possibility of opening up old wounds would have on the six women. Devlin said, "They (the victims) disagreed among themselves about the deal. Some agreed, some were very unhappy, and some were relieved." Devlin said the case came to light thanks to "six strong women" who reported similar experiences of victimization when seeking help in OMC's emergency department.

Hill pleaded not guilty to the original charges and was adamant about not wanting to plead guilty to lesser charges for something he said he did not do, Ausserer said. It took three or four weeks to convince Hill the plea deal was his best option, Ausserer said, especially after the court denied a motion to hold a separate trial for each woman. In his statement to the court, Hill refuted one-by-one and in detail the claims of the six women using diagrams, explanations of prescription dosages, and a narrative of each of his interactions with the women when they visited the emergency department. All of the care he delivered and all that he did, Hill said, was in the best interest of patients.

He accepted the deal, he said, because the risk was too great that he could spend the rest of his life in prison and unable to see his two young children had he been convicted on the felony counts. Agreeing to the gross misdemeanors also meant he would not have to register as a sex offender. Hill said, "This has been the most difficult thing I have ever gone through in my life, to have people believe that I did something so heinous." Three of the women who accused Hill of assaulting them gave emotional victim impact statements to the court in which they described what they said occurred when they received treatment from Hill. One victim died around the time Hill was first charged in 2022.

One woman said she arrived in the emergency department on April 23, 2022 after she was injured in an automobile accident, with broken ribs and a collapsed lung. She said she struggled to stay awake when the assault occurred. She said, "I had been taught to trust doctors, police, and teachers. You took that trust away." A second woman said her experience changed her life forever. She arrived in the emergency department after he suffered a drug overdose, and she said Hill assaulted her by groping her. Another woman didn't remember

being assaulted. In her statement read to the court, she said she only learned of it a year and a half after it occurred when someone reviewing the OMC videotape for evidence saw it and reported it to law enforcement.

Hill had been working in OMC's emergency department since July of 2020. Hill was arrested in July of 2022. The state Department of Health suspended Hill's medical license the same month.

From the *Washington State Standard*: Washington's Fish and Wildlife Commission is expected to vote next month on removing the state's "endangered" species designation for wolves. It's a controversial proposal. Environmentalists say it would result in the animals losing protections when wolves still haven't recovered in parts of the state. But Department of Fish and Wildlife officials and others contend that not much would change in terms of how the animals are shielded from hunting and argue the change makes sense because of how wolf numbers have rebounded. A state report says Washington's wolf population increased by 20% last year, the 15th year in a row it grew. You can read more here: <https://washingtonstatestandard.com/2024/06/24/vote-nears-on-ending-endangered-status-for-wa-wolves/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can reach out to us at news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.