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Carlos Ruano
COURTESY PHOTO

Prosecutors plan to dismiss a child molestation charge against a 67-year-old man as part of a plea deal in which he admitted Friday to falsely imprisoning the victim.

Carlos Alfonso Ruano pleaded no contest to a charge of felony false imprisonment in connection with a July 29, 2012, incident involving a 7-year-old girl at his West Montecito Street home.

Mr. Ruano will be placed on probation for three years when Superior Court Judge Frank Ochoa sentences him Nov. 15. He will be ordered not to contact the victim or her family.

Mr. Ruano also will be sentenced to a year in jail, which he has already served. He is expected to be released from County Jail as soon as an immigration hold is cleared.

The District Attorney's Office last year charged Mr. Ruano with committing a lewd act on the girl, who was related to Mr. Ruano through marriage and was visiting his house.

However, a jury last month split 9-3 in favor of guilt, leading to a mistrial.

Deputy District Attorney Benjamin Ladinig said he decided to forego a retrial after considering the evidence and the wishes of the victim and her family.

The first trial was difficult for the victim, who testified, and a second time would be even worse, Mr. Ladinig said.

The prosecutor will dismiss the child molestation allegation when Mr. Ruano is sentenced.

Defense attorney Jeremy Lessem said he believes in Mr. Ruano's innocence. Mr. Lessem said he was prepared to move onto a retrial and believed the defense would be successful, but Mr. Ruano decided taking a deal would be what is best for him and his family.

"He wants to go on," said Mr. Lessem, adding he doesn't blame his client for not wanting to go through a second trial.

False imprisonment isn't a sex-related crime, and although it is a felony, it can be reduced to a misdemeanor conviction in the future, Mr. Lessem said.

The conviction also has less detrimental immigration-related consequences.

Mr. Ruano served as the sexton at the All Saints-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church on Eucalyptus Lane, charged with various maintenance duties, such as mechanical and electrical systems.

Numerous members of the church have attended court proceedings in support of Mr. Ruano, including Friday's hearing.

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