

Calgary

'Predatory' police officer fired after sending suicidal woman up to 100 texts in 4 days

Dave Pizzolato fired by Calgary Police Service after unwanted texts and 'creepy' visit to woman's home

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The young woman at the centre of the case is a sexual assault survivor who was also a victim of human trafficking. Const. Dave Pizzolato responded to a call after she tried to kill herself in 2016. (Sinisha Karich/Shutterstock)

A Calgary police officer has been fired after he tried to start an unwanted

and "predatory" relationship with a young woman who had just tried to kill herself, sending her up to a hundred text messages in four days while she lay recovering in hospital and dropping by her home uninvited.

CBC News has obtained a copy of the decision by retired Calgary Police Service superintendent Paul Manuel to fire Const. Dave Pizzolato for discreditable conduct. Pizzolato is only the third officer in more than two decades to be terminated from CPS.

The decision, which came after a CPS disciplinary hearing in September, describes Pizzolato's conduct as "reprehensible" as well as "predatory and exploitive" toward an "extremely vulnerable" woman.

Pizzolato — a 22-year veteran of the force — was terminated by the CPS last week, although he has 30 days to appeal.

In September, Pizzolato pleaded guilty to discreditable conduct and insubordination before the hearing.

The victim

The young woman at the centre of the case was referred to in the decision as "Ms. M."

She is a sexual assault survivor who was also a victim of human trafficking. She operates at the level of someone between the ages of 14 and 16 and was victimized for most of her childhood, the document states.

In 2016, she tried to kill herself and a friend called 911. Pizzolato responded.

The woman was 22 at the time and Pizzolato was 48.

The woman was taken to hospital, where she spent several days.

Over the four days, M was in hospital, Pizzolato sent her 75 to 100 text messages from his personal cellphone, calling her "hon," "sweety" and "sweetness."

'Suggestive, inappropriate' texts

Hours after she tried to kill herself, Pizzolato wrote, "I would really love to see you again.... I feel your pain! I really do!"

The texts were "too familiar, too suggestive, inappropriate, unsolicited, unwanted and wholly unprofessional," wrote Manuel.

M showed the messages to hospital staff who were so concerned that they contacted the police force.

At one point over the four days she was in hospital, M sent a message back to Pizzolato in an effort to get him to stop.

"BTW, my mentor from the Boys and Girls club saw my texts with you and thought I should make it clear that I'm only interested in the resources," wrote M. "I hope that you weren't interpreting this differently."

Yet, Pizzolato continued to message.

Pizzolato pays 'creepy' visit to her home

And then the constable turned up at her home.

On the day she was released from hospital, Pizzolato showed up at M's apartment and took her for ice cream.

She later told investigators she felt pressured to go with him and "scared about what he might do to her" if she didn't.

The woman told police said she didn't feel safe and didn't know what to do.

The two parked with their ice creams and Pizzolato told her about his ex-wife. He said she could take a ride with him on his motorcycle one day.

He touched her on the arm and put his hand on her leg.

'I was scared'

She said the conversation made her feel "creepy."

"I was confused because sometimes he acted like a police officer and sometimes he acted like he wanted to date me," M told investigators.

"I was scared and didn't feel safe and didn't know what to do."

Hospital staff found out about Pizzolato's visit and contacted CPS to have an officer check on the woman.

When Pizzolato returned to the woman's apartment to drop her off, he spotted the marked patrol car and let her out at the side of her building.

The officer's conduct was even more egregious because he'd done the same thing with other women he met on-duty and just two weeks earlier, his staff sergeant warned him to stop.

Pizzolato faces assault charge

Pizzolato also had a history of bungling investigations.

In 2014, he labelled a file involving an 11-year-old sexual assault victim "inactive." Twice, he was told to do more work on the case but he kept closing the file. Eventually, it was handed over to another officer.

In April 2016, Pizzolato failed to properly investigate a car prowling/vandalism complaint, which Manuel called "a [sheer] neglect of duty."

The CPS disciplined him for both incidents.

Manuel wrote that Pizzolato was a good "reactive police officer" when he was responding to calls "where there is little to no investigation or followup required."

Pizzolato also faces allegations of criminal wrongdoing.

Last year, he was charged with assault after the arrest of a man in downtown Calgary in 2016.

- [Calgary police member charged after allegedly assaulting a man under arrest](#)

A trial took place last month with a judge set to deliver a decision in December.

'My judgment was askew by my caring for her'

The officer's lawyer, Greg Dunn, argued his client crossed a line, acted inappropriately and showed a "lack of self-restraint," but said Pizzolato "wears his heart on his sleeve."

"I honestly thought that I was the only person that was going to make a difference in her life," Pizzolato said at the hearing.

"My judgment was askew by my caring for her and having a bond with her that I felt."

Ultimately, though, Manuel found Pizzolato's actions "clearly demonstrate that he is not suitable to hold the office of police officer."

"In society, police officers are held to a higher standard. Police officers are professionals; people who are honest and trustworthy and of the highest moral standards. They are expected to be leaders in our community and to set an example. Constable Pizzolato has broken this public trust and when one police officer breaks that trust, it is left to all police officers and the police service to earn that trust back.

"His usefulness as an employee of the service has been annulled."

Dunn confirmed Pizzolato will appeal the decision.