

Gallup police officer allegedly punches minor

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 April 2022 06:39



A Gallup police officer is currently on administrative leave after hitting a minor.

On Dec. 5, around 1:08 am, McKinley County Sheriff's deputy Terrence Willie was sent to 607 Pillar Ave. in Gamerco in reference to a domestic dispute. The caller explained to the Metro Dispatch that a man, Justin Benally, 29, had hit his young cousin, who is a minor.

The caller told Metro Dispatch that Benally was intoxicated.

When Willie and MCSO Sgt. Johnson Lee arrived at the scene, Willie spoke to two witnesses, Benally's mother and father.

According to the criminal complaint, the two parents said that Benally had been arguing with his ex-wife.

When Benally's mother walked into the living room, the former couple were standing face-to-face while Benally was yelling at his ex-wife. That's when Benally's young cousin tried to get in the middle of the argument, and Benally allegedly attacked her, punching her in the face.

After talking to Benally's parents, Willie turned to his ex-wife.

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The woman explained that they had been drinking and playing games, and they even took shots of alcohol together. But then Benally started “bringing stuff up about the divorce.”

The woman said she tried to change the subject, but then Benally started arguing with her and put his finger in her face, the police report states.

The woman stated that Benally’s younger cousin did try to get in between them and stop the argument, and that’s when Benally punched her. The woman said Benally’s cousin tried to walk away from Benally, but he continued to punch her. The woman also noted that the victim hit Benally in self-defense.

While Wille was interviewing the family members, Lee was speaking with Benally.

Benally admitted to drinking and said that the argument started because he didn’t want his ex-wife at his grandfather’s funeral.

When Willie met with the victim, he noticed that her eye was almost swollen shut. According to the criminal complaint, her eye was also starting to bruise.

The victim stated that Benally hit her one time, and then she walked into a bedroom, where Benally tried to follow her.

Benally was placed under arrest for child abuse.

Benally is currently employed as a police officer with the Gallup Police Dept. In an interview on April 12, Gallup Police’s Patrol Captain Erin Toadlena-Pablo explained that Benally was put on administrative leave once he was arrested. He will remain on administrative leave while the investigation into this case continues.

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Benally's trial is scheduled for Aug. 16.

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