### FOR PUBLICATION

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# IN THE SUPERIOR COURT

### COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

COMMONWEALTH OF THE	) CRIMINAL CASE NO. 16-0069
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS,	)
	)
Plaintiff,	ORDER FINDING NO PROBABLE
	) CAUSE AS TO COUNTS II, IV, VI, AND
v.	) VIII, MISCONDUCT IN PUBLIC OFFICE
	) IN VIOLATION OF 6 CMC § 3202, AS
JAMES CAMACHO DELEON	) THE COMMONWEALTH FAILED TO
GUERRERO, JESSE SALAS	) PROVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF
CONCEPCION,	) THE OFFENSE
,	)
h	)
Defendants.	)
	)
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### I. INTRODUCTION

This matter came before the Court on April 22, 2016 at 1:30 p.m. and on May 9, 2016 at 1:30 p.m. in Courtroom 220 for a preliminary hearing. On April 22, 2016, the Commonwealth was represented by Assistant Attorney General Shannon Foley. On May 9, 2016, the Commonwealth was represented by Assistant Attorney General Shannon Foley and Assistant Attorney General Matthew Baisley. Defendant James Camacho Deleon Guerrero ("Defendant Guerrero") was also present at both hearings and represented by Attorney Matthew Holley. Defendant Jesse Salas Concepcion ("Defendant Concepcion") was present at both hearings and represented by Attorney Richard Pierce.

Based on a review of the filings, oral arguments, and applicable law, the Court makes the following order.

#### II. BACKGROUND

On April 18, 2016, the Defendants were charged by information with Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree in violation of 6 CMC § 1306(a), Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202, and Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree in violation of 6 CMC § 303(a). The Defendants were not charged with any prostitution-related offenses.

At the April 22, 2016 preliminary hearing, the Commonwealth called two witnesses: Attorney General's Investigation Division Investigator Vicente B. Babauta and Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent Haejun Park. The Defendants called one witness: Office of the Public Auditor Investigator Melissa Bauleong.

At the close of the April 22, 2016 preliminary hearing, the issue arose of whether the Defendants could raise an affirmative defense at a preliminary hearing. The Court heard arguments on the issue of whether the Defendants could raise an affirmative defense at the preliminary hearing stage on May 9, 2016. On May 9, 2016, the Court also heard arguments as to whether there was probable cause for Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, Misconduct in Public Office, and Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree.

The Court issued a separate order as to the Defendants' affirmative defense argument. *See Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 18, 2016) (Order Denying the Defendants from Presenting the Affirmative Defense of Mistake of Age Under 6 CMC § 1310(b) at the Preliminary Hearing As That Issue Is Solely for The Ultimate Trier of Fact).

Defendant Guerrero was charged in Count I with Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, in Count II with Misconduct in Public Office, in Count III with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, in Count IV with Misconduct in Public Office, and in Count VII with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. Defendant Concepcion was charged in Count III with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, in Count VI with Misconduct in Public Office, in Count VII with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, and in Count VIII with Misconduct in Public Office.

The Court also issued a separate order finding no probable cause as to Counts I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor In the First Degree under 6 CMC § 1306(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense).

The Commonwealth filed a Petition for Writ of Mandamus on June 14, 2016 as to the Court's dismissal without prejudice of Counts I and V of the Information, which charged the Defendants with Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. A motion to stay has not been filed with the Commonwealth Superior Court, nor has an order staying proceedings been issued by the Commonwealth Supreme Court.

On June 30, 2016, the Court issued an order finding no probable cause as to Counts III and VII, Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts III and VII, Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree in Violation of 6 CMC § 303(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense).

The Court will proceed in determining probable cause as to the remaining four counts, which charge the Defendants with Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202.

#### III. LEGAL STANDARD

A defendant's right to a preliminary hearing is not guaranteed by the Commonwealth Constitution, nor is it guaranteed by the United States Constitution. *Babauta v. Superior Court*, 4 NMI 309, 313-14 (1995). Rather, this right is provided for in the Commonwealth Rules of Criminal Procedure and in the Commonwealth Code. Under Rule 5.1 of the Commonwealth Rules of

Criminal Procedure, defendants are entitled to a preliminary hearing, formally titled a "preliminary examination," when he or she is "substantially deprived of his/her liberty." NMI R. Crim. P. 5.1.

The Commonwealth Criminal Code elaborates on the preliminary examination further stating, that if there is no "probable cause to believe that a criminal offense has been committed and that the arrested person committed it, [the Court] shall discharge the arrested person." 6 CMC § 6303(f). In other words, the preliminary hearing ensures that there is probable cause both that a crime was committed and that the defendant is the person who committed it.

The preliminary hearing is an important "mechanism to weed out groundless claims and thereby avoid for both defendants and the [Commonwealth] the imposition and expense of an unnecessary criminal trial." *Commonwealth v. Crisostimo*, 2005 MP 18 ¶ 14 (quoting *Mills v. Superior Court*, 728 P.2d 211, 214 (Cal. 1986)). Therefore, "a finding of no probable cause is neither a conviction nor an acquittal." *Id.* (quoting *Illinois v. Harkness*, 339 N.E.2d 545, 547 (Ill. App. Ct. 1975)). Since the Commonwealth must only show probable cause at a preliminary hearing, evidentiary rules do not apply. NMI R. Evid. 1101(c)(2). In evaluating the evidence at a preliminary hearing, the Court must "view all evidence in the light most favorable to the prosecution and draw all reasonable inferences in favor of the prosecution." *State v. Schmidt*, 2015 UT 65 ¶ 4 (Utah 2015) (internal quotation marks omitted) (citation omitted).

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The Defendants in this case were charged by information with three offenses: Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, and Misconduct in Public Office. The Defendants were not charged with any prostitution-related offenses. At the May 9, 2016 hearing, the Court inquired from the Commonwealth's attorney whether they were proceeding with prostitution-related theories, and he indicated that the Commonwealth would not.

In this order, the Court will address whether there is probable cause for the charges of Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. Defendant Guerrero was charged with Misconduct in Public Office in Counts II and IV of the Information. Defendant Concepcion was charged with Misconduct in Public Office in Counts VI and VIII of the Information. The Court will address these charges in turn.

#### A. Probable Cause as to Misconduct in Public Office

#### a. Count II as to Defendant Guerrero

Defendant Guerrero is charged with Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. Count II alleges that Defendant Guerrero, "being a public official of the Commonwealth, performed illegal acts under the color of his office as described in Count I of this Information." Information at 1-2. Count I of the Information charges Defendant Guerrero with Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. The Court found no probable cause as to Count I in its May 27, 2016 order. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor In the First Degree under 6 CMC § 1306(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense).

To show probable cause for Misconduct in Public Office, the Commonwealth must show that, on or about June 2013 in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Defendant Guerrero was: "1. a public official who does 2. any illegal act 3. under color of office." *Commonwealth v. Atalig*, 2002 MP 20 ¶ 46 (citing 6 CMC § 3202).

# 1. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct Occurred on or About June 2013

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that the alleged incidents of misconduct occurred on or about June 2013. The Court heard testimony from Investigator Babauta and Special

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Agent Park that the alleged incidents occurred on or about June 2013. Defendant Guerrero does not contest these dates. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

# 2. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct Occurred on the Island of Saipan

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that the alleged incident of misconduct occurred on the Island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Both Investigator Babauta and Special Agent Park testified that misconduct, if any, occurred on the Island of Saipan. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

# 3. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct was Committed by Defendant Guerrero

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that Defendant Guerrero is the individual that committed the charged offense. Special Agent Park identified Defendant Guerrero at the April 22, 2016 hearing. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

# 4. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that Defendant Guerrero was at the Time the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety

Special Agent Park testified that Defendant Guerrero was at the time the Commissioner of the Department of Public Safety, a public official. Therefore, there is probable cause as to this element.

# 5. The Commonwealth Failed to Show Probable Cause that Defendant Guerrero Committed Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree

There are issues with the element of Misconduct in Public Office requiring that Defendant Guerrero engage in an illegal act. 6 CMC § 3202. Although the Commonwealth Code describes the illegal act as "any illegal act," the Commonwealth specifically charges Misconduct in Public Office as related to the allegation in Count I, Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. The Court has, as described above, found no probable cause as to Count I. See Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts

I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor In the First Degree under 6 CMC § 1306(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense).

Further, the Court asked the Commonwealth's attorney if they were proceeding under the theory that Defendant Guerrero failed to act or "willfully neglect[ed] to perform the duties of his or her office" 6 CMC § 3202. The Commonwealth's attorney stated that the Commonwealth was not prosecuting Defendant Guerrero for neglecting to perform his duties. Thus, if there is no probable cause for the crime charged in Count I, the Commonwealth cannot provide probable cause as to Misconduct in Public Office under Count II.

# 6. The Commonwealth Failed to Produce Evidence that Defendant Guerrero's Alleged Crimes Occurred "Under Color of Office"

Further, the Commonwealth failed to produce evidence that any alleged crimes occurred "under color of office" as required by statute. *Atalig*, 2002 MP 20 ¶ 46; 6 CMC § 3202. In *Atalig*, the defendant was found to have committed his crimes under color of office because the crimes of disturbing the peace and assault and battery occurred while on a work trip, and since the defendant was the victim's workplace superior. 2002 MP 20 ¶ 3, 52. In essence, the crimes were related to the defendant's work and status as a government official.

In the present case, the Commonwealth has not presented evidence that the alleged sexual abuse occurred under color of Defendant Guerrero's office. The witnesses testified that the incidents occurred in the back of a T-100 pick-up truck and the Commonwealth did not present evidence showing that the truck was a DPS vehicle. Rather, the testimony presented at the preliminary hearing showed that Defendant Concepcion owned a silver T-100 pick-up truck, and that the Department of Public Safety owned a black T-100 pick-up truck. There was no testimony that the Department of Public Safety vehicle was the vehicle used during the incidents. There was no testimony as to the make, model, color, or license plate number of a specific Department of

Public Safety vehicle, nor was there any testimony about logbooks indicating use of the vehicle, gas mileage, or days of use.

Further, there was no evidence that Defendant Guerrero presented any symbols of his office during the alleged incident, including his badge, identification cards, gun, police lights, police sirens, police report forms, or government vehicle stickers.

Thus, there was no testimony or evidence establishing that the offense occurred under color of office. Further, because the Commonwealth specifically tied this Misconduct in Public Office to Count I's charge of Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree, there is no probable cause as to Count II's charge of Misconduct in Public Office. Like a house of cards falls when a card is missing, so does this charge.

#### b. Count IV as to Defendant Guerrero

Defendant Guerrero is charged with a second count of Misconduct in Public Office, in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. Count IV alleges that Defendant Guerrero, "being a public official of the Commonwealth, performed illegal acts under the color of his office as described in Count III of the Information." Information at 2-3. Count III of the Information charges Defendant Guerrero with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. The Court found no probable cause as to Count III in a previous order. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. June 30, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts III and VII, Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree in Violation of 6 CMC § 303(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense at 5-7).

As a result, Count IV fails for the same reason Count II failed: there was no probable cause found for the underlying offense as charged. The Court incorporates by reference its analysis of Misconduct in Public Office discussed in Section IV A. a. above. In the case of Count IV, the Court found no probable cause as to Count III, thus the Court cannot find probable cause as to Count IV.

# c. Count VI as to Defendant Concepcion

Defendant Concepcion is charged with Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. Count VI alleges that Defendant Concepcion, "being a public official of the Commonwealth, performed illegal acts under the color of his office as described in Count V of this Information." Information at 3.

This charge for Misconduct in Public Office specifically relates to the allegations made in Count V of the Information. The Court found no probable cause as to Count V in its May 27, 2016 order. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor In the First Degree under 6 CMC § 1306(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense).

To show probable cause for Misconduct in Public Office, the Commonwealth must show that, on or about June 2013 in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Defendant Concepcion was: "1. a public official who does 2. any illegal act 3. under color of office." *Commonwealth v. Atalig*, 2002 MP 20 ¶ 46 (citing 6 CMC § 3202).

# 1. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct Occurred on or About June 2013

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that the alleged incidents of misconduct occurred on or about June 2013. The Court heard testimony from Investigator Babauta and Special Agent Park that the alleged incidents occurred on or about June 2013. Defendant Concepcion does not contest these dates. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

# 2. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct Occurred on the Island of Saipan

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that the alleged incident of misconduct occurred on the Island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Both

Investigator Babauta and Special Agent Park testified that misconduct, if any, occurred on the Island of Saipan. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

# 3. The Commonwealth Presented Evidence that the Alleged Misconduct was Committed by Defendant Concepcion

The Commonwealth must show probable cause that Defendant Concepcion is the individual that committed the charged offense. Investigator Babauta identified Defendant Concepcion at the April 22, 2016 hearing. Thus, there is probable cause for this element.

4. The Commonwealth Produced Evidence that Defendant Concepcion was at the Time a Police Officer 3 in the Department of Public Safety Investigator Babauta testified that Defendant Concepcion was a Police Officer 3 at the time of the alleged incident. Police officers are public officials under 6 CMC § 3202. Commonwealth v. Kaipat, 2 NMI 322, 332-3 (1991). Thus, there is probable cause as to this element.

# 5. The Commonwealth Failed to Provide Probable Cause that Defendant Concepcion Committed Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree

The Court found no probable cause as to Count V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. May 27, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts I and V, Sexual Abuse of a Minor In the First Degree under 6 CMC § 1306(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense). Thus, there is no probable cause as to this element.

The Court asked the Commonwealth's attorney if they were proceeding under the theory that Defendant Concepcion failed to act or "willfully neglect[ed] to perform the duties of his or her office" 6 CMC § 3202. The Commonwealth's attorney stated that the Commonwealth was not prosecuting Defendant Concepcion for neglecting to perform his duties. Thus, if there is no probable cause for the crime charged in Count V, the Commonwealth cannot provide probable cause as to Misconduct in Public Office under Count VI.

As a result, Count VI fails for the same reason Counts II and IV failed: there was no probable cause found for the underlying offense as charged. The Court incorporates by reference its analysis of Misconduct in Public Office discussed in Section IV A. a. above. In the case of Count VI, the Court found no probable cause as to Count V, thus the Court cannot find probable cause as to Count VI.

6. Commonwealth Failed to Produce Evidence that Defendant Concepcion's Alleged Crimes Occurred "Under Color of Office"

Likewise, the Court incorporates by reference its analysis in Section IV A. a. 3. as to why the Commonwealth has presented no evidence that the alleged offense occurred under color of office.

### d. Count VIII as to Defendant Concepcion

Defendant Concepcion is also charged with Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. Count VIII alleges that Defendant Concepcion, "being a public official of the Commonwealth, performed illegal acts under the color of his office as described in Count VII of this Information." Information at 4.

This charge for Misconduct in Public Office specifically relates to the allegations made in Count VII of the Information. Count VII of the Information charges the Defendants with Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree. The Court found no probable cause as to Count VII in a previous order. *Commonwealth v. Deleon Guerrero*, Crim. No.16-0069 (NMI Super. Ct. June 30, 2016) (Order Finding No Probable Cause as to Counts III and VII, Conspiracy to Commit Sexual Abuse of a Minor in the First Degree in Violation of 6 CMC § 303(a), as the Commonwealth Failed to Prove an Essential Element of the Offense at 8).

As a result, Count VIII fails for the same reason Counts II, IV, and VI failed: there was no probable cause found for the underlying offense as charged. The Court incorporates by reference its analysis of Misconduct in Public Office discussed in Section IV A. c. above. In the case of Count

VIII, the Court found no probable cause as to Count VII, thus the Court cannot find probable cause as to Count VIII.

### V. CONCLUSION

The Office of the Attorney General prosecutes crimes and decides what charges to file. Every crime has elements or parts, and the Law requires a prosecutor to prove each and every element. Like an airplane with missing wings will not fly or a car without wheels will not move forward, when the prosecutor fails to prove an element of a crime then that particular charge fails. Here, the Commonwealth failed to show probable cause for the element that the Defendants had committed an illegal act under color of office, as charged in the Information.

The Commonwealth specifically linked each Misconduct in Public Office charge to other alleged crimes charged in the information—charges that have since been dismissed for lack of probable cause. Like a house of cards falls when a card is missing, so do these charges for Misconduct in Public Office.

In addition, the Commonwealth has not presented evidence that the alleged sexual abuse occurred under color of Defendant Guerrero or Defendant Concepcion's office. The witnesses testified that the incidents occurred in the back of a T-100 pick-up truck and the Commonwealth did not present evidence showing that the truck was a DPS vehicle. Rather, the testimony presented at the preliminary hearing showed that Defendant Concepcion owned a silver T-100 pick-up truck, and that the Department of Public Safety owned a black T-100 pick-up truck. There was no testimony that the Department of Public Safety vehicle was the vehicle used during the incidents. There was no testimony as to the make, model, color, or license plate number of a specific Department of Public Safety vehicle, nor was there any testimony about logbooks indicating use of the vehicle, gas mileage, or days of use.

Further, there was no evidence that the Defendants presented any symbols of their offices during the alleged incident, including their badges, identification cards, guns, police lights, police sirens, police report forms, or government vehicle stickers.

Accordingly, the Court finds that there is no probable cause as to Counts II, IV, VI, and VIII of the Information, charging Defendant Guerrero and Defendant Concepcion with multiple counts of Misconduct in Public Office in violation of 6 CMC § 3202. These charges are dismissed without prejudice.

When a charge is dismissed without prejudice at the preliminary hearing stage, double jeopardy has not attached so the Office of the Attorney General may re-file charges.

So that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer,<sup>2</sup> the Court encourages the Office of the Attorney General to carefully review a case before filing any criminal charges to make sure all the elements of a crime can be proven with facts and evidence.

IT IS SO ORDERED this day of June, 2016.

JOSEPH N. CAMACHO Associate Judge

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Court especially emphasizes the special role that a prosecutor has in our legal system, and finds the language from *Berger v. United States* to be particularly instructive:

<sup>[</sup>A prosecutor] is the representative not of an ordinary party to a controversy, but of a sovereignty whose obligation to govern impartially is as compelling as its obligation to govern at all; and whose interest, therefore, in a criminal prosecution is not that it shall win a case, but that justice shall be done. As such, he is in a peculiar and very definite sense the servant of the law, the two fold aim of which is that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer. He may prosecute with earnestness and vigor - indeed, he should do so. But, while he may strike hard blows, he is not at liberty to strike foul ones. It is as much his duty to refrain from improper methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction as it is to use every legitimate means to bring about a just one