

“I was videotaped in my locker room:” Pre-teen pleads for tougher law after hidden camera nightmare

POSTED 9:05 PM, FEBRUARY 4, 2016, BY BRYAN POLCYN AND STEPHEN DAVIS



PLEASANT PRAIRIE — A local mom is on a mission to change state law. She and her then 10-year-old daughter found hidden cameras in a public locker room after swim practice. She's sharing her story for the first time.

It's been nearly two years since Christina Walker and her little girl uncovered what turned out to be a massive spy cam operation in Pleasant Prairie.

The man and woman behind the plot are now in prison. But it's what Walker learned during the investigation that prompted her to come forward and tell her story in case the same thing ever happens to your family.

For Walker, the nightmare started two years ago when her 10-year-old daughter was recorded, fully nude, by a pair of hidden video cameras.

"I was videotaped in my locker room getting dressed after swim practice," the child recently said while testifying at the Capitol in Madison.

The woman who put the cameras there told police the reason she did it is complicated.

"Normal people don't want these things, right?" Melissa Wenckebach asked rhetorically, in a videotaped police interview obtained by FOX6 News.

Nervously rocking, and at times sobbing, Wenckebach told police about how Karl Landt persuaded her to do it.



Melissa Wenckebach confesses to a sordid plot to secretly record women and children in locker rooms.

"He's really smart," she said, her voice almost whining, her eyes red and puffy. "Really smart in a scary way."

Landt had a sexual relationship with Wenckebach. They worked together at Uline in Pleasant Prairie, a shipping supply company so large it has its own fitness center.

The prosecutor called Landt a sociopath who spent years grooming women to secretly record others in order to satisfy his perversions.

"This defendant is a sexual predator," Prosecutor Michael Gravely said at his sentencing.

Wenckebach was not the first person Landt approached -- or even the first one to agree -- but she was by far the most persistent.

"It's like you start something and you shouldn't have," Wenckebach told police. "You know you shouldn't have, but you can't stop."

Police say Landt supplied video cameras to Wenckebach, who then took them into the women's locker room at Uline and set them up.

"The camera would be hidden. It was usually in a make-up bag or a mesh bag," said Pleasant Prairie Police Detective Laura Hoffman. "You would still be able to view the locker room and she would just leave the locker room door open."

Video evidence obtained by FOX6 News shows Wenckebach setting the cameras up, her face staring into the camera lens as she arranges the proper angle, hoping to capture the best view of the locker room. Once the cameras are in place, she steps away, revealing an empty locker room, where unsuspecting victims would soon walk in and disrobe, unaware they were being watched.

She performed this task hundreds of times over the course of three years.

Landt labeled each video with things like "Hot Marketing Blonde," "Dopey Brunette Married Girl," and "Chubby Z."

"It was so unbelievably hurtful," another victim testified. "I can't even begin to explain, considering the whole reason I was down in the gym was to get rid of that chub."

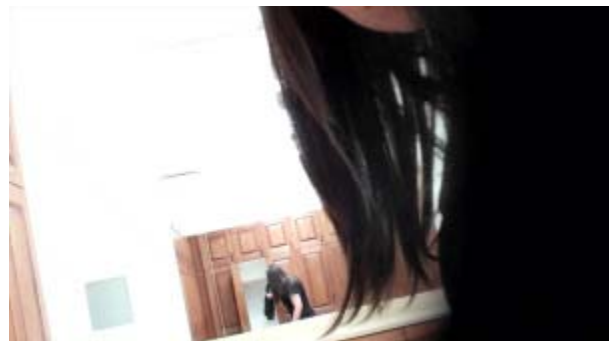
When they got tired of spying on their own co-workers, Wenckebach got a job at the publicly-owned RecPlex in Pleasant Prairie. She started placing cameras there, too.

Until one day, when a child noticed something was wrong.

"And she said, 'Mom, my coat and shoes aren't in the locker,'" Walker said.

Walker's daughter said someone else's belongings were inside her locker. When Walker peered in through the vents, she saw a camera lens pointing back out. And in the next locker over, another one, in the exact same spot. That's when she called security and they called police. A female officer responded and cut the locks off of two lockers, pulling cameras out of both.

"It was still videotaping currently as she lifted it out. She shook her head and I just started



Video evidence obtained by FOX 6 shows Wenckebach setting up a camera in a locker room at her workplace, Uline - a shipping supply company in Pleasant Prairie.

crying," Walker said.

Wenckebach was arrested on the spot. When police raided Landt's home in Illinois, they recovered 50 terabytes of data, including thousands of hours of video recorded at Uline and the RecPlex.



Prosecutors say Karl Landt provided the cameras to Wenckebach and coerced her into making the recordings. One video shows Landt preparing a camera before handing it over to Wenckebach.

pornography," Hoffman said.

Walker was certain of that.

"This is absolutely child pornography, I mean, it is the essence of the definition of pornography," Walker said.

But there was something prosecutors worried they could not prove.

"That the recordings were done for any sort of formal type of sexual gratification," Hoffman said.

"When the detectives told me that it could not be charged that way, I was crushed," Walker said.

"It was unbelievable the amount of video footage," Detective Hoffman said.

Hoffman had the unenviable task of watching the videos and identifying victims. In that process, one thing stood out. Something the prosecutor called attention to at Landt's sentencing. The RecPlex videos showed undressed, minor children.

"We were originally hoping that there we would be able to pursue some type of charge of production of child



Instead of the more serious charge of producing child pornography, the defendants were charged with "Capturing an Image of Nudity -- a Class "I" Felony, the lowest level felony in Wisconsin.

Christina Walker talks to FOX6 Investigator Bryan Polcyn about the gut-wrenching feeling of knowing her daughter was recorded in a locker room.

"It bothered me that there wasn't more that could be done," Hoffman said.

The part that bothered Walker the most -- the videos of her daughter were charged the same as if she was an adult.

"You need to change this law to protect the youngest members of our society," Walker said during testimony in Madison.

Walker is now an outspoken champion of a bill that would increase the penalty for secretly recording in locker rooms and other private places when the victim is under 18.

"We should be protected by stronger laws and stronger punishments," Walker's daughter told a hearing room full of state lawmakers, staff aides and reporters.



Pleasant Prairie Police Chief David Smetana testifies in Madison alongside Walker.

Pleasant Prairie Police Chief David Smetana also testified during that hearing.

"What we're trying to do is place a greater emphasis on the victimization of those children," Smetana said.

State Senator Lena Taylor (D-Milwaukee) questioned whether harsher penalties are necessary.

"We have laws that caught these individuals," Taylor said.

After all, Landt and Wenckebach were charged with more than 200 felonies each. They were convicted of 47 – one for each of the 47 positively identified victims.

"I'm just trying to understand what we're accomplishing," Taylor said.

Walker pointed out that most cases don't have 47 victims.

"Enhancing this bill will also protect children that could possibly be a single victim," Walker said.

"We live in an era where the invasion of privacy that we have in this case will become easier everyday," Gravely said.

Landt and Wenckebach used flip video cameras to make their recordings — devices about the size of a smartphone.

But micro-technology is making cameras that are much smaller, cheaper and harder to detect.

"Technology is not on our side," Gravely offered, ominously.



Karl Landt is now serving 12 years in prison. Wenckebach was sentenced to 6 years.

In other words, there *will* be more victims — some of them children.

"They are so much more vulnerable," Walker said.

To a mom, they are the victims who matter most.

"I feel that by making the punishment stronger, criminals will be less likely to make another kid feel the same that I did," Walker's daughter told lawmakers.

The locker room privacy bill sponsored by Representative Samantha Kerkman (R-Salem) is scheduled for a vote by the full Wisconsin Assembly on Tuesday, February 9th.