

# Former Minnesota sheriff's deputy faces charges of sexually assaulting minor

By [Tim Speier](#)

February 10, 2022 05:55 PM

[https://www.bemidjipioneer.com/news/minnesota/former-minnesota-sheriffs-deputy-faces-charges-of-sexually-assaulting-minor?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=publicsafety&utm\\_content=500086](https://www.bemidjipioneer.com/news/minnesota/former-minnesota-sheriffs-deputy-faces-charges-of-sexually-assaulting-minor?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=publicsafety&utm_content=500086)

GARRISON, Minn. — A former Mille Lacs County sheriff's deputy faces charges of sexually assaulting a girl when she was as young as 6 years old.

Russell James Bankey, a 73-year-old Garrison man, was charged Jan. 12 with first-degree criminal sexual conduct in connection to sexually assaulting the girl from about 2009 to 2015.

In August 2021, the victim recorded a call with Bankey, according to the criminal complaint. The charges state he apologized and said he assaulted her because "I guess I was lonesome." He also allegedly said he'd be in a "lot of trouble" if it ever got out about what he did.

According to the complaint, the victim told the Benton County Sheriff's Office in August that Bankey sexually abused her as far back as she could remember.

Almost all the acts occurred at Bankey's residence in Garrison, the complaint stated — hundreds of times until she was 10 or 11 years old. Other times, the assaults happened in his camper during trips in the summer.

Mille Lacs County Sheriff Don Lorge said Thursday, Feb. 10, Bankey worked for the sheriff's office part time in court security between Dec. 19, 2016, and Aug. 24, 2021. Lorge noted his hiring took place before Lorge's election to sheriff.

Lorge said he could not comment on the charges and added, "the case was conflicted out" when it was learned he worked for the department. Bankey had no disciplinary infractions during his employment, the sheriff said.

A spokesperson with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe confirmed Bankey also worked for the Mille Lacs Band Tribal Police Department but was unable to confirm when or what position he held as of Thursday afternoon.

A LinkedIn profile with a matching name and likeness states Bankey was the chief law enforcement officer for the Mille Lacs Band between June 1987 and October 1996.

The felony charge Bankey faces carries a penalty ranging from not less than 12 years or more than 30 years in prison, a \$40,000 fine or both.

Bankey will make his initial court appearance March 17.