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Caregiver sentenced to 30 years in federal prison

Judge finds convicted therapist to be 'arrogant'

Wichita ? A federal judge called a Newton therapist “arrogant and a bully” as he sentenced him and his wife to prison for abusing mentally ill residents at the group home they operated.

Arlan Kaufman, 69, was sentenced to 30 years and his wife, Linda, was sentenced to seven years in prison. Federal jurors found Arlan Kaufman guilty in November of 31 federal charges and Linda Kaufman of 30 counts. They include health care fraud, Medicare fraud, forced labor and holding clients in involuntary servitude at the Kaufman House Residential Treatment Center.

“You are an arrogant individual, you don’t recognize what you have done is wrong,” District Judge Monti Belot told Arlan Kaufman. “You see yourself as a victim of some massive conspiracy.”

But Belot showed some leniency for Linda Kaufman, agreeing with Wichita psychiatrist Ted Moeller that she had a dependent personality and was manipulated by her husband.

Belot told her at her sentencing that he gave her husband what amounts to a life sentence at his age: “I feel he is dangerous … not you.”

Defendant speaks

Arlan Kaufman spoke for three hours before he was sentenced, rehashing much of his trial testimony and going into details about his patients’ sex lives. He also accused Belot of not giving him a fair trial because he said he didn’t have

enough time to put on a proper defense and some of his witnesses weren't allowed to testify.

He told the judge he didn't think he and his wife should spend the rest of their lives in prison for trying to help mentally ill patients.

"It was never my intent to exploit any of my patients," he said.

Arlan and Linda Kaufman are shown in this Oct. 5 file photo walking to the federal courthouse in Wichita for their trial on several federal charges including servitude.

If he came across as argumentative during the trial, he told the judge, it was because he viewed it as a "fight for my life."

"I am sorry if any of you felt coerced into doing anything against your will," he said in his statement to some of the former residents in the courtroom at his sentencing.

Belot was clearly unmoved by the statement.

"You have to be careful about digging yourself a hole with your own teeth – but that is what you did," the judge said.

Belot also called Arlan Kaufman a hypocrite for apologizing to his victims in his statement and then going into details about their sex lives.

'Humble and broken'

Linda Kaufman, speaking in court for the first time, told the judge she never intentionally hurt anybody and asked for forgiveness.

"I stand before you today humble and broken," she said softly.

She told the judge she wishes the couple had long ago sold the residential houses and gotten out of the mental health business: "I wish I had the boldness to tell my husband I've had enough."

Defense attorney Steve Joseph, who represented Linda Kaufman, told the judge in his closing statement that the husband even manipulated her defense by making her turn down a plea agreement offered by prosecutors that would have given her probation. The couple has been married 40 years.

The control he possessed over her was so strong that it was not until the couple was jailed after their convictions, and she was away from her husband for two months, that she finally started participating in her defense and agreed to a psychiatric evaluation, Joseph said

Her attorney likened her to the residents of the Kaufman House, noting she, too, was working along with them on the other side of Arlan Kaufman's camera – including one video, which was not introduced at trial, that showed her naked from the waist up.

The Kaufman's three adult children issued a statement saying the government's pursuit of their parents has devastated their entire family.

"Mom and Dad are not the evil, conspiring people the government has made them out to be. We know them as loving, compassionate, caring people who consistently reached out to those in need," the family said.

Controlling lives

Federal prosecutors contended the Kaufmans controlled the lives of mentally ill residents, including deciding who could wear clothes. They were found guilty of forcing residents to masturbate, fondle each other and shave each other's genitals – activities that Arlan Kaufman videotaped.

“The Kaufmans controlled virtually every aspect of the lives of the residents, determining which rooms they would sleep in, what furniture they would be allowed to have, when they would eat, what recreational activities they could engage in, when they could be downstairs and who could enter and leave the houses,” U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren said in a news release. “Rather than lawfully and responsibly carrying out their duties as caregivers, the Kaufmans used physical force and threats to intimidate the residents, to isolate them from their families and to sexually humiliate them.”

But Arlan Kaufman, whose social work license was suspended in 2001, has insisted the residents’ behavior was voluntary. He testified that he videotaped the residents so they could see themselves more objectively when their judgment was not so clouded or emotionally charged.

The Kaufmans incorporated their unlicensed treatment center in 1980 and ran it until their arrests in October 2004. Their crimes dated to 1984.

A restitution hearing was scheduled for Feb. 7