

State Drops Rape Charges

'Victim' Retracts Attack Story

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Staff Writer

Charges against a former Sarasota teacher's aide accused of raping a woman at gunpoint in November have been dropped by the state attorney's office after the woman admitted she lied about the attack.

Cleodis Peterson, 27, 1525 25th St., was cleared April 17 of involuntary sexual battery with a firearm, involuntary sexual battery, kidnapping, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and two counts of battery, prosecuting and defense attorneys said.

Assistant State Attorney Patrick Deering said the woman, Valerie Malone of Sarasota, retracted her

hope he can regain some of what he's lost."

Malone originally told police this story: On Nov. 18 she accepted a ride home from Peterson, who pulled a gun, brought her to a wooded area near 44th Street and North Central Avenue and raped her.

Two witnesses said they saw Peterson hit Malone, who screamed as he followed her out of the woods. The witnesses notified

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PETERSON'S ATTORNEY

story just before she was placed under oath to take a lie detector test April 11. Deering said she turned to a detective, admitted the story was false and refused to take the test.

"She told him she made the whole thing up," Deering said, adding that he learned of the admission the day after the test. "I proceeded to drop all the charges."

Attempts to contact Peterson were unsuccessful, and a woman answering the door at his address declined to comment. Buddy Moore, Peterson's attorney, said his client wants to put the case behind him and does not wish to discuss it with reporters.

"I'm elated they dropped the charges," Moore said. "My client indicated throughout that he was innocent. I'm very happy for him. I

the authorities, and Malone showed deputies where Peterson lived before she was taken to Sarasota Memorial Hospital. Moore said witnesses also heard Peterson accuse Malone of robbing him.

Peterson was arrested Nov. 21 and released from the Sarasota County Jail the next day after posting a \$100,000 bond, sheriff's officials said Thursday. The day of his release, Peterson was fired from his job as a teacher's aide for emotionally and physically handicapped students at the Sarasota County Student Center. Law enforcement authorities notified school officials of the arrest.

Deering said he and Moore had some concerns about parts of Malone's story, and Deering asked her to take a lie detector test. But
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before Malone was put under oath, she retracted her story and refused to take the test.

Deering said a medical examination administered Nov. 18 indicated that Malone had sex recently, and he could not explain why she recanted her story.

"We can only go by what the statements of the victim are," he said. "Who knows what actually happened in those woods?"

Even though Malone admitted to lying, she cannot be prosecuted for filing a false crime report, a misdemeanor. Deering said Malone was granted immunity from prosecution under a special subpoena authorities issue to compel unwilling witnesses to testify. Deering and sheriff's spokesman Lt. Bill Stookey said.

Deering said Malone had failed to comply with several subpoenas before she finally agreed to cooperate. Malone, who has been arrested for prostitution and petty thefts, could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Moore said he intends to contact school officials within the next two weeks to see if Peterson can be rehired. Dr. Walter Pierce, assistant school superintendent for human resources, said Thursday nothing prevents Peterson from applying for a job with the school system.