

Probation Granted but Judge Denies diversion for Headley

Stars had supported ex-sheriff

FRANKLIN, Tenn. -- Former Williamson County Sheriff Ricky Headley was sentenced to five years probation on Monday for his involvement in a prescription drug scandal. Headley's attorneys asked the judge to clear his criminal record after five years of probation, but the judge declined citing Headley's position in law enforcement.

Headley's attorney, David Raybin, said Headley should have sought professional help when he realized his problem.



Headley took the stand in a Williamson County courtroom this morning and for the first time since he was arrested on prescription drug charges on Jan. 31, 2007, spoke publicly about the case. He explained how he became addicted to painkillers while suffering from lower back problems. He admitted to coming to work under the influence of painkillers. Prosecutor Derek Smith said acting sheriff Dusty Rhoades once drove Headley home because he had taken pain pills. Headley would not admit to driving under the influence of Hydrocodone or Soma, but said he could not remember if he did.

David Raybin and Ricky Headley

Headley offered an apology to the people who voted for him and the residents of Williamson County. "I am absolutely sorry and remorseful for all this happening," Headley said. "There was absolutely no way possible I would have ever jeopardized the life I had if something had not had a hold of me. I was out of control."



Letters signed by country music legend George Jones, right, and Christian singer Michael English, left, are included in court documents asking a judge to give former Williamson County Sheriff Ricky Headley, center, a chance to expunge his criminal record.

On Feb. 13, Headley pleaded guilty to five misdemeanor counts and resigned his position as sheriff. He was placed on five years of probation.

Letters signed by country music legend George Jones and Christian singer Michael English, and testimony from two friends who spoke about Headley singing to raise money for sick and poor people in Williamson County, failed to sway Blackwood.

Documents in Headley's court file state that he spent 26 days at Bradford Health Services, an addiction treatment center in Warrior, Ala., after being arrested on Jan. 31, 2007.

Headley is working on a music career

Headley, an Alabama native, became addicted to pain pills in 2005 while suffering from back problems and tried to stop taking them before his arrest, according to a clinical report in his file. He has participated in a full-time addiction recovery program and attends at least three 12-step recovery meetings each week.

Headley resigned as sheriff in order to avoid jail time and felony charges. He said he has been working for a friend who owns a marketing and production business and singing for a gospel group. Headley owes on loans totaling \$406,500, according to court records. One of the loans was for \$20,000, which he took out to help pay for his 2006 re-election campaign.

"Bottom line is he has just lost his job and he has financial obligations of all sorts and is doing the best he can to support himself and his family," said David Raybin, Headley's attorney. "He will pay all his debts in due course."

Headley supporters raised more than \$10,000 to go toward legal fees at a fundraiser held one month before he pleaded guilty. Headley declined to report his legal fees in a probationary report.

Brooks helped campaign

Headley said he got his pills from pharmacist Glenn Brooks, whom he was introduced to as a man that could help him connect with voters in the Brentwood area.

"He told me to let him know if he could ever help me with any of my prescriptions," Headley told a probation officer. "He said he would only file insurance for law enforcement officers and not charge a co-pay."

Headley said Brooks eventually gave him pills without a prescription. Brooks is awaiting trial in federal court.

Christian singer Michael English, who pleaded guilty to 12 counts of fraudulently obtaining prescription painkillers in 2000, wrote a letter supporting Headley's attempt to clear his record. English was given the same diversion status Headley is seeking.

"It made a big difference in my life," English wrote in a letter. "It gave me hope that I would not end up a legal cripple for the rest of my life."

George Jones and his wife, Nancy, also wrote a letter on Headley's behalf. They said they met Headley when he was "drumming up" support for a concert to raise money for the Williamson County chapter of the American Red Cross.



"We know Ricky Headley as a Good Samaritan, friend and good citizen of our community," they wrote. "We are honored to call him our friend."

Former Williamson County Sheriff Ricky Headley, center, talks with his attorney David Raybin, left, after a judicial diversion hearing at Williamson County Judicial Center in Franklin on Monday. At right is his attorney Russ Heldman.