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Wilputte Alanson Sherwood

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A former priest who served 10 years in prison on sexual abuse charges has been released from the Arizona State Hospital.

Wilputte Alanson Sherwood, 58, served his prison sentence and in August was ordered confined to the state mental hospital while experts determined whether he could be classified as a sexual predator.

But Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Barbara R. Mundell signed an order on Oct. 20 and freed Sherwood from the hospital.

Maricopa County Attorney Rick Romley said he intends to pursue the issue further in the courts.

"I am very upset with this ruling and I have authorized my appellate division to file an appeal," Romley said.

In 1993, Sherwood pleaded guilty to attempted sexual conduct with a minor and attempted dangerous crimes against children.

He served his full 10-year prison term, but prosecutors had him committed for treatment at the state hospital under Arizona's sexual predator law.

Arizona is among 16 states that have such a law, which allows authorities to confine sex offenders indefinitely even after they have completed prison sentences if a judge and psychological experts determine they are likely to re-offend.

In May 2001, Mundell ruled that the law was unconstitutional.

She agreed, however, to put her ruling on hold until the law could be reviewed by the Arizona Supreme Court.

Since then, the state Supreme Court, acting on guidelines from the U.S. Supreme Court, has ruled post-prison treatment can be ordered if a judge and psychological experts agree a sex offender is suffering from a mental disorder and is incapable of controlling his or her actions.

Mundell signed Sherwood's release order, apparently after experts testified he was able to control his actions, The Arizona Republic reported.

She declined comment to the newspaper.

According to court records from 1993, Sherwood acknowledged that he had sex with 1,840 people, including 22 minors.

A former pastor and church youth minister, Sherwood is banned from public ministry for life.