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## Stepfather confesses to child molestation

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After five years of denying he raped his two stepchildren and one of their friends, Wayne Sargent Jr. admitted to the crimes Wednesday.

Sargent, 33, was convicted in Belknap County Superior Court in May on nine counts of aggravated felonious **sexual** assault and felonious sexual assault for molesting the children between 1995 and 1996.

He had been convicted in 1997 for the same crimes and sentenced to 21 to 54 years in prison. But the state Supreme Court overturned the verdict last year because Judge Larry Smukler did not allow a defense expert to testify about how "false memories" can be implanted in children through suggestive questioning.

At Sargent's sentencing Wednesday, Smukler handed down the same sentence - 21 to 54 years in prison.

"I wasn't in denial for what I had done, but I just didn't want to pay the consequences," Sargent told the judge. "Now I don't think there's anything I could ever do or say to my children that would convince them of how sorry I am."

Smukler commended Sargent on his honesty and added a provision that would allow Smukler to ask for 5 years off his sentencing if he completes the state sex offender program.

"For the first time there is a lack of total denial," Smukler said. "I think that's important for the victims and for you."

The victims - two girls and a boy - testified during the May trial that Sargent made them shower together, then rubbed them with baby oil during sleepovers at his Belmont mobile home. The girls also testified that he had sex with them.

"Wayne Sargent is a sick man and has put my brother and I through a lot of stuff," one of the girls said at the sentencing.

Sargent said he was indebted to his children for bringing his actions to light.

"I have to thank my children because I had a problem and it's because of you that I've gotten help," he said. "I have always loved you and I always will and I just ask that you forgive me for what I have done."

Nick Brodich, who represented Sargent's stepson, and Elaine Baillargeon, who represented the two girls, said the children were satisfied with the sentence.

But Baillargeon said Sargent's apology was too little, too late.

"He's put these victims through hell not once, but twice," she said. "To finally admit now doesn't make it any better. These kids' lives have been destroyed."