



LIZ O. BAYLEN Los Angeles Times

VICTIM: A mother holds her daughter, the victim of a sexual assault at the El Monte adult day-care center. "Eight years is nothing for all the damage he has done to all these kids and their families," the mother said.

Plea deal reached in assaults at care center

Under the agreement, a former worker at the facility would get no more than eight years.

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A former employee of an adult day-care center in El Monte pleaded no contest Thursday to sexually assaulting three severely disabled women with the mental capacity of children.

The plea came in exchange for an agreement with prosecutors that he be sentenced to no more than eight years in prison.

Juan Fernando Flores, 43, faced up to 27 years had he been convicted of all the charges, which included multiple assaults and the transmission of a sexual disease. The victims all have mental disabilities, including Down's syndrome, and range in age from 24 to 54.

Flores, who worked as a cook and driver at the government-subsidized facility, then known as Healthy Start, was arrested last May. After the arrest, he con-

fessed to assaulting the three women, said El Monte Police Det. Ralph Batres. He said police suspected there may have been other victims but did not have enough evidence to press more charges.

The assaults occurred between June 2009 and last April, according to court records.

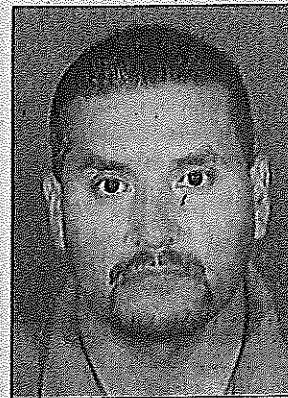
Under the terms of the deal, Flores would have to serve 85% of the sentence and register as a sex offender upon release.

The mother of one of the victims, a Rosemead woman, said that the deal came as a surprise and that she hoped the judge would reject it.

"Eight years is nothing for all the damage he has done to all these kids and their families," the mother said.

K.B. Forbes, executive director of a community group called Consejo de Latinos Unidos, said his organization would ask the district attorney to reopen the case to search for other victims.

Jane Robison, a spokeswoman for the Los Angeles County district attorney's office, said the prosecutor notified the victims' families in advance that a plea bar-



HELD: Juan Fernando Flores was a cook and driver at the facility. He was arrested last May.

gain would be presented to Flores.

"With these kinds of cases we never want to subject the victims to more trauma, and this was a difficult case because of the victims' disabilities," she said. "We felt that this [resolution] was appropriate."

The victims were identified in court records as Jane Does 1 to 3. The Times does not name sexual assault victims unless they choose to go public.

The criminal case was set for trial next week in Los An-

geles County Superior Court in Pomona.

Instead, Judge Jack Hunt set a sentencing hearing for Feb. 17 at which the victims and their families will be given an opportunity to describe the effect of the crimes on their lives.

Several families pulled relatives out of the facility after the arrest, and police sent letters to clients' families suggesting they be tested for sexually transmitted diseases.

For some, that was their first notice of any potential harm to the day-care clients. Others said they had harbored suspicions for some time based on behavior changes they noticed in their loved ones.

Last fall, some of the relatives held a protest outside the center, calling for stricter oversight and safeguards.

Flores was being held in jail. His lawyer, Peter Navarro, declined to comment.

Calls to the day-care center, which now operates as New Day, were not answered.

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