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US singer Chris Brown was sentenced to probation and community work for beating his former girlfriend pop star Rihanna.

The 20-year-old pleaded guilty in June to one count of felony assault relating to an incident that occurred hours before the pair were due to perform at the Grammy Awards.

At Los Angeles Superior Court yesterday, Brown was told that he must serve five years probation and perform six months of community labour in his home state of Virginia.

Rihanna was not in court to see her attacker sentenced.

The sentence was in line with recommendations agreed between Brown and prosecutors as part of a plea bargain.

It has been heavily criticised by domestic abuse campaigners who claimed it is too lenient.

The attack on Rihanna left her bleeding and badly bruised.

Brown, her then boyfriend, was arrested on 8 February, hours after a party in Los Angeles.

According to an affidavit filed by an LA police detective, the altercation took place in a car when Rihanna checked Brown's mobile phone and found a text message from another woman.

Detective De Shon Andrews wrote that Brown attempted to push Rihanna out of the vehicle before punching her repeatedly. He also bit her ear, the affidavit states.

He then allegedly threatened to kill her when she pretended to phone her assistant to get police help.

According to the detective, the alleged assault left Rihanna with a mouthful of blood. Brown is also alleged to have tried to choke her.

Following the incident, pictures apparently showing the female singer's beaten and swollen face were leaked on to the internet.

In July - five months after the attack - Brown publicly apologised for his behaviour.

In a video posting on his website, the singer said he was "truly, truly sorry", adding that what he did was unacceptable and he had apologised to his victim "countless" times.

Judge Patricia Schnegg told Brown that if he violated the terms of his sentence, including staying away from Rihanna, he could be sent to prison.

She added that she wanted the 20-year-old to perform physical labour instead of community service, such as mentoring young people.

Responding to the sentencing, Roslyn Muraskin, an expert in women and the law and director of the Long Island Women's Institute, said: "I think it is terrible. Here is a guy that beat up his girlfriend - he deserves to see some prison time."

She said that the sentence sent out a negative message to women who may be too scared to report abuse at the hands of a violent partner.

Ms Muraskin added: "The headache we have is that we do not treat it seriously enough when a man beats up on his woman.

"Most women fear reporting the crime. They are afraid to come out because look what happens - nothing happens."

Speaking after the sentencing hearing, Rihanna's lawyer Donald Etra confirmed that the non-contact order would remain in place for the duration of the probation sentence.

He said: "The stay away order was imposed by the court requiring Mr Brown to stay 100 yards from Rihanna except at an entertainment event when Mr Brown has to stay 10 yards away.

"The court was quite explicit that the stay away order would be imposed for a five-year term."

But he added that Rihanna could seek to modify the terms of the order if she so desired.

Mr Etra said his client was "doing fine", adding: "She's pursuing her career and I think that she also wants to make it clear that throughout the course of this entire case, she has been tremendously appreciative of the support her family, friends and fans have given her throughout the world."