

Teen acquitted of rape after 5 months in jail

■ Family rejoices after verdict

By **JOHN WHARTON**
Staff writer

A teenage boy from Great Mills spent more than five months in jail on a rape charge until jurors acquitted him Friday, launching a celebration by his family who had long sought his pretrial release through court hearings and protests.

John K. Edison Jr., 16, was incarcerated the day after a July 5 visit by a 12-year-old girl to his family's home. St. Mary's District Judge John F. Slade III ordered

that Edison be held without bond. District Judge Robert Riddle ruled later that month that there was sufficient evidence for the case to proceed, but also ordered an investigation to determine if the case should be transferred to juvenile court.

Edison's no-bond detention continued after the district court charges were replaced by new ones in circuit court served through a summons, and Circuit Judge C. Clarke Raley declined to

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amend the boy's pretrial custody.

In October, Circuit Judge Marvin Kaminetz denied the request by Edison's lawyer to transfer the case to juvenile court. Kaminetz ruled that concerns for public safety, underscored by the youth's previous drug infractions and assault allegations, outweighed testimony that he was amenable to treatment through the department of juvenile services.

Edison remained in jail until his four-day trial last week ended Friday, when jurors who deliberated about an hour cleared the teenager of a second-degree rape charge, a second-degree sexual offense, fourth-degree sexual offense and second-degree assault.

"He was innocent from Day 1. I knew he didn't do it,"

his father, John K. Edison Sr., said, as he and the boy's other relatives awaited his release from the county jail.

"God knows the truth," the father continued. "That's why he's getting out today."

The teenager said in an interview from the jail last August, as his parents carried picket signs outside the county courthouse calling for his pretrial release, that the paperwork from the investigation itself pointed to his innocence and that his statements to police were misconstrued. At last week's trial, defense lawyer Kevin McDevitt continued the focus on contradictions between medical evidence and the girl's allegations, and he told jurors that any sexual contact between his client and the girl was consensual.

McDevitt said detectives questioned another girl visiting the house more forcefully about her claim that she was sexually assaulted by another boy who was there that night,

and that the investigators determined that her allegation was unfounded. The girl accusing Edison of a sexual assault was not questioned as intensely, the lawyer said, and he said neither should be believed.

"The credibility of these people is at issue. These girls lied about every single thing," the lawyer said in his closing argument, but he looked beyond them for the impetus that put his client on trial.

"These girls are victims," McDevitt said. "They're victims of a system that let them down. The adults in this case and their lives let them down."

McDevitt accused a police investigator of perjury in his testimony about a pretrial conversation with the lawyer. McDevitt reminded jurors that consensual sexual activity between two people within the age difference of the girl and his client is not a crime, and that there was no medical evidence to support

the charge that they had intercourse.

"She's a virgin," the lawyer said.

St. Mary's Assistant State Attorney Joseph Stalanonis pursued the case through its pretrial hearings, but assistant prosecutors Julie White and Daniel White presented the state's evidence at the trial. The prosecutors alleged that when the girl and her cousin went to Edison's home after July 4 fireworks, he overpowered her as he took her into his bedroom.

McDevitt countered that the girls voluntarily remained at the home for several hours after the alleged incidents, until they left shortly before dawn.

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