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### St. Mary's Teenager Acquitted Of Rape

By Christy Goodman  
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A 16-year-old St. Mary's County boy accused of raping a girl in July was acquitted on all counts Friday. Jurors deliberated for less than an hour before finding John K. Edison Jr. of Great Mills not guilty.

"It doesn't take long when you are innocent," said Alice Gaskin, Edison's aunt. "I just thank God [jurors] had the heart to do what was right."

Edison was charged as an adult with second-degree rape and other offenses. He was accused of assaulting the girl, then 12, after she and her cousin had walked to his home July 5.

The families of both teenagers listened to testimony during the trial in St. Mary's County Circuit Court in Leonardtown, which lasted much of the week.

During her three-hour testimony, the girl, 13, said Edison grabbed her arms and pulled her into his bedroom. She said Edison forced her down and raped her, despite her attempts to fight back. She said Edison playfully hit her with a belt as she and her cousin were leaving.



Defense attorney Kevin J. McDevitt said that the contact between the two was consensual and that the girl was using rape as an excuse for getting home late.

"The story that the state has painted is based on a girl who was trying to stay out of trouble," McDevitt said in his opening statement.

Prosecutors said the girl had no reason to lie and that throughout the investigation she maintained that Edison tried to have sex with her against her will. Physical evidence

showed that the two had some sort of sexual contact, although it was not clear that an attack occurred. The nurse who examined the girl testified that she found no evidence of physical trauma.

Edison did not testify.

McDevitt declined to be interviewed after the trial ended Friday. The prosecutors could not be reached.

"We are thankful that we can go home and celebrate Christmas," said Gaskin, as she waited for her nephew to be released from the county jail, where he had been since his arrest in July. She said that now he can get back to his life, return to school and get his learner's permit.

Staff writer Matt Zaposky contributed to his report.

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