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At this moment, state is violating civil liberties of a 16-year-old

Wednesday, Oct. 1, 2008

Held in adult jail without bond since July 5, 16-year-old John Edison Jr., faces years in prison on charges that he violently raped a 12-year-old girl and beat her with a belt. The problem? Edison essentially has been confined in a government cage over mere accusations of rape by the alleged victim.

Prior to initial hearings, Maryland prosecutors provided Edison's defense attorney, Kevin J. McDevitt, with no physical evidence that a rape had occurred, nor statements gathered from Edison himself or the accuser.

According to The Enterprise (July 18), "McDevitt argued that the only evidence presented ... was the statement from the alleged victim," and added a deputy sheriff who described to the court the victim's account of the alleged rape, was aware of no other evidence suggesting Edison had committed such a heinous crime.

Gee, perhaps that's because there's none to be found. In a recent conversation I had with Edison's aunt, Alice Gaskins, I learned that the 12-year-old girl's hospital examination – conducted only hours after this alleged rape took place – revealed no evidence that a physical or sexual assault had occurred, much less a violent rape. In fact the exam indicated that the accuser was still a virgin after Edison allegedly raped her.

But let's rewind a bit, shall we? This entire fiasco began on the Fourth of July, when the alleged 12-year-old victim and her 15-year-old friend were hanging out with John Edison and his friend all night at Edison's house. At approximately 7 a.m. on July 5, Edison told the girls they had to leave because his father would soon be home from work. The boys then accompanied the girls out of the house, a scene witnessed by a neighbor who has said the four kids were laughing and getting along.

So imagine John Edison's surprise when police showed up about three hours later to arrest him for rape. According to the family's account of the 911 tape, the 15-year-old girl initially claimed that Edison had raped her, but when she went to the hospital to be examined, she retracted this allegation and instead insisted that Edison raped the 12-year-old.

One need not be a legal scholar to realize that the state of Maryland is at this very moment violating the civil liberties of a 16-year-old child, who is almost certainly innocent of the charges levied against him. But to understand how easily John Edison can be stripped of his freedom, forcibly removed from family and friends, perhaps we need to examine the prosecution itself.

This case is under the purview of St. Mary's County State's Attorney Richard Fritz, who in 2000 made the following comment to former "20/20" host Chris Wallace:

"I know that, as a prosecutor myself, if a 15-year-old girl came in and told me that she was held down, raped by three different people, I'd immediately have them arrested and charged with first-degree rape."

In no uncertain terms, John Edison Jr. remains confined in a Leonardtown jail awaiting trial on absolutely nothing more than an accusation by a 12-year-old (or 15-year-old, but who's counting?) and a near-dictatorial decree from a state's attorney who's on record saying that if a young girl accuses someone of rape, by golly, he's gonna go and find someone to charge.

Sure sounds like justice to me.

Trevor Bothwell, Dowell



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