Auburn man acquitted on rape, sex trafficking and assault charges

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AUBURN — A 58-year-old local man was acquitted Tuesday on rape, sex trafficking and assault charges after a four-day trial.

Willie Minor was facing four felonies, including gross sexual assault, which is punishable by up to 30 years in prison.

He also faced charges of aggravated sex trafficking and aggravated assault, each carrying a maximum punishment of 10 years in prison.

The fourth felony count, domestic violence assault, is punishable by up to five years in prison.

A jury of six men and six women returned not guilty verdicts on all six counts, including two misdemeanors.



Willie Minor appears in Androscoggin County Superior Court in Auburn last week for the start of his trial. He was acquitted Tuesday on all counts. *Sun Journal photo by Daryn Slover*

A 45-year-old woman who was homeless, addicted to crack and heroin and working as a prostitute to feed her drug habit said she had met Minor on a Lewiston Street in the summer of 2016.

She said he raped her, then forced her into prostitution after she had stopped the practice when she moved into his apartment.

Taking the witness stand, she said Minor had forced her to advertise online for oral sex and suffered regular beatings at his hands, including an assault with a sledge hammer on Thanksgiving morning when he gave her a scalp wound.

She said he had threatened her with a handgun Minor kept in a locked bathroom cabinet.

Minor's testimony countered his alleged victim's account, telling the jury he was the one who suffered her assaults. He said the two of them had consensual sex and she had full control of her prostitution practice after she drained his bank account to support her drug habit.

During its more than three-hour deliberation, the jury asked for more coffee, the sledge hammer and a clearer definition of violation of privacy, one of the misdemeanor charges.

Prosecutors presented physical evidence, including a broken plate, a clump of the woman's hair found in the kitchen trash and photos of the woman's cuts and bruises taken during her stay at the emergency room at a Lewiston hospital, where she was taken after her sister brought her to the police station.

Defense lawyer James Howaniec portrayed Minor as a "pathetic" and "feeble" old man who was caught up in a lurid sex web, sometimes including threesomes. He said the police testimony and physical evidence supported the defense's account of events, not the alleged victim's.

He said her claim she had been raped by Minor, then afterward asked for his phone number, did not make sense. Neither did her being in love with a man who beat her routinely, Howaniec said.

Howaniec said Tuesday, after the verdict was read by the court clerk, he was pleased with the acquittals on all charges.

"It's been a long, nearly three-year ordeal for my client," he said.

Howaniec said he surmised the jury had "some difficulty with the testimony of the alleged victim."
He credited the jury with spending the time needed to process all of the facts in the case to return verdicts on all six counts.

Howaniec said Minor is "obviously very pleased to have this behind him," especially in light of the penalties for the four felony counts.

"We're all relieved on his behalf," he said.

Assistant District Attorney Nathan Walsh, who prosecuted the case, said Tuesday, “We’re disappointed, but respect the jury’s decision.”

Minor was convicted in federal court in April 2018 of having a gun after being convicted on a domestic violence charge.

He asked for a different court-appointed lawyer shortly before the jury was selected for his trial, but the judge told Minor he could keep his lawyer or go it alone.

Last summer, a judge declared a mistrial on the charges after a witness mentioned federal criminal charges during testimony.

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