

Prosecutor gets a lawyer for girls in lawsuit

■ Acquitted rape suspect pursues civil claims against his accusers

By **JOHN WHARTON**
Staff writer

Two teenage girls with their mothers faced trial alone this week in a lawsuit filed by an acquitted rape suspect, until a prosecutor stepped up and got them a lawyer in the civil case now postponed to August.

A judge granted a motion for summary judgment earlier this year removing two detectives from the lawsuit alleging they mishandled a rape investigation leading to the arrest of the teenage boy, who was acquitted at a trial. The judge ruled, however, that John Kendell Edison Jr.'s civil claims against two girls, including a 12-year-old whose accusations led to his arrest in 2008, could proceed.

The mothers of the two girls have,

from the onset, contested the lawsuit's allegations against the two children. On Tuesday, the mothers stood in a St. Mary's courtroom, with their daughters seated behind them.

Visiting Prince George's County Circuit Judge Sean D. Wallace was asking them about the status of their legal representation when St. Mary's Assistant State's Attorney Joseph Staloni approached, identified himself as a prosecutor in the criminal case and said he would see to it that the defendants in the civil case had a lawyer.

Michael J. Winkelman, one of Edison's lawyers in the civil case, responded in court that it was an "unusual" step by a prosecutor who is a witness in the civil proceeding and has submitted to a deposition.

The two mothers also told the

judge that they would take it upon themselves to make sure that the girls had a lawyer.

One of the mothers said, "If I have to, I'll put a second mortgage on my house."

"I'm definitely getting a lawyer," the other mother said.

Wallace agreed to a recess, and two prosecutors accompanied by a detective left to go upstairs to their office at the courthouse.

James E. Farmer, a Charles County attorney, said Thursday that he will represent the defendants in the lawsuit.

"The claim [against them] is basically meritless," Farmer said. "As soon as I'm able to review all the documents and pleadings, we'll be attacking."

The Lexington Park teenager's law-

suit accuses the two girls of making false and misleading statements to police, including the allegations of rape, which led to the arrest of the suspect, then 16, as an adult on charges including one count of second-degree rape. He was acquitted by a jury.

Winkelman said after Tuesday's hearing that the prosecutor's involvement in the brief proceeding was not only unusual, but "perhaps unprecedented."

Staloni said Thursday that his offer to get legal assistance for the defendants in the lawsuit was appropriate.

"Sometimes, when you see injustice about to happen, you have an obligation to try to help out if you can," the prosecutor said. "Unfortunately, they're the target of somebody's anger."

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