



## 16-year-old to remain jailed on charges of raping girl, 12 Investigation to determine if suspect in case should be tried as a minor

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There is enough evidence, District Judge Robert Riddle said Thursday in a Leonardtown courtroom, to proceed with charges of rape and assault against a 16-year-old Great Mills boy.

As family members of John K. Edison Jr. sat in the courtroom, Riddle also said he would allow for an investigation to determine if the boy should be charged as a minor.

Edison is accused in charging papers of pulling a 12-year-old girl into his bedroom on July 5 and having intercourse with her. He is being held without bond on charges which include second-degree rape and a second-degree sexual offense. "Currently he's being held at the St. Mary's County Detention Center and charged with a sex offense against a child and he's only 16 years old," Edison's defense attorney Kevin McDevitt said.

McDevitt argued that the only evidence presented at this time was the statement from the alleged victim. The defense attorney asked sheriff's deputy James Fontana, who described the victim's account of the rape, if he was aware of any other witness accounts or scientific evidence against Edison.

The deputy said he was not aware of any other evidence.

"I would suggest at this point in the trial there's not enough," evidence to show probable cause, the lawyer said.

McDevitt said there were several witnesses that have yet to be questioned.

In a hearing earlier this month, McDevitt said the matter had not been fully investigated and if that process was completed the case would have been dismissed.

He said that placing Edison in a juvenile facility would aid in the investigation to determine if the 16-year-old should be tried as a minor.

State's Attorney Richard Fritz (R) said although he did not object to the investigation, he would like to see Edison remain at the county's detention center, a request Riddle approved.

"The court has no difficulty in finding probable cause in this case," the judge said.

Riddle found that if a police officer believes a victim's statement, that alone is enough evidence to proceed with a trial.

The girl told police that the suspect struck her with a belt after raping her, according to a statement of probable cause. Fontana said that Edison admitted to striking the girl with a belt, but said "he was playing."

Fontana also said in court Thursday that the defendant gave several variations in his account of what happened and that he admitted to fondling the girl.

Edison will be kept at the detention center while a juvenile investigation is done, a process that could take several weeks or even months, McDevitt said. He said in an interview that the defendant maintains his innocence.

