

12/22/2018

Nurse to serve six months for manslaughter

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke nurse convicted of manslaughter for the death of a patient was sentenced Friday to serve at least six months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 40, was sentenced to six to 23 months in the county jail followed by three years of probation over the death of Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at the Guardian Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough imposed the sentence Friday, ordering Levandowski to have no contact with Johnson's family and to forfeit her registered nursing license.

Levandowski was initially charged with neglect of care of a dependant person, a felony alleging she "intentionally, knowingly or negligently" failed to provide sufficient care to Johnson. In September, she pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter, a misdemeanor offense with a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Prosecutors said Johnson had a ruptured aneurism and brain bleeding, and was admitted to Guardian on the day of her death after being removed from a ventilator.

At least four staff members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, they were concerned about Johnson pulling on a breathing tube, but she stayed seated at the nursing station, prosecutors said.

At one point when Johnson pulled out the tube, Levandowski reinserted it but failed to call 911 as required by facility policy, prosecutors said. About a half-hour later, another nurse found Johnson had pulled out the tube and was unresponsive, according to prosecutors.

A nurse told authorities Levandowski directed her to fill out a form indicating regular 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson, even though they had not been, according to prosecutors.

After being sentenced Friday, Levandowski was remanded to the county jail to serve her sentence. Vough gave her credit for 30 days time served.

12/13/2018

Officer in police chase that injured Swoyersville woman testifies in court

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The lead officer for much of a police chase that resulted in a civilian being injured in a crash testified Wednesday that he considered the risk to the public and felt it was appropriate to continue the pursuit.

The man behind the wheel of the stolen Dodge Nitro the afternoon of Nov. 7, 2014, was Douglas Johnson, 56, of Nanticoke, who was wanted on felony warrants and suspected of being in possession of a gun, Wilkes-Barre police Officer David Balchun said.

"We were chasing a felon in a stolen vehicle, with a possible gun," Balchun testified, saying he thought the risk of abandoning the chase was greater than continuing it. "I don't know what he was going to do."

Swoyersville resident Donna Jackson is suing the City of Wilkes-Barre and Hanover Twp. over the chase, which took place after Hanover Twp. police spotted Johnson and tried to pull him over. As Johnson tried to evade police, he took to sidewalks and went the wrong way on a one-way street.

The chase ended at River and West Market streets in Wilkes-Barre after Johnson ran a red light and hit another vehicle that then smashed into Jackson's vehicle, which was traveling westbound on Market Street.

The lawsuit alleges Jackson suffered traumatic brain injury, brain bleeding, memory loss, herniated disks, sight problems, pain and other injuries as a result of an "ill-advised and dangerous police chase."

Balchun testified that he is trained in conducting police chases and that he believed continuing the chase was appropriate, despite Johnson taking to sidewalks and yards to avoid being captured.

While police followed Johnson up one-way streets during the chase — as allowed by law — they did not blow stop signs or follow Johnson when he left the roads, he said. However, while Balchun initially maintained that the chase did not put civilians at risk, he acknowledged during questioning by plaintiff's attorney Neil T. O'Donnell that Jackson was, in fact, put at risk by the chase.

O'Donnell questioned Balchun about police policy on "caravanning," or having more than two police cars chasing a suspect. Balchun said he was aware of a prohibition on the practice, and acknowledged that radio recordings of the chase indicate at least four police cars were involved in pursuing Johnson.

But attorney James A. Doherty Jr., representing the Wilkes-Barre Police Department, noted that police policy says each situation is unique and gives officers on the scene discretion. The policy also calls for two officers to handle each suspect, and there were two other people in the car with Johnson, Balchun noted.

Despite the report of Johnson having gun, police did not find any weapons in Johnson's possession or in the stolen vehicle, he said. Johnson later pleaded guilty to charges of receiving stolen property and fleeing police in the case, and was sentenced to eight to 16 years in prison for those and other offenses.

The civil trial is expected to continue through the end of the week.

12/11/2018

Nanticoke man may withdraw guilty plea for sexual assault

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A Nanticoke man was scheduled to be sentenced Monday on charges he had a sexual relationship with a minor and conspired to steal items

from a Turkey Hill store.

Only one sentence was imposed.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough gave Dylan Charles Monelli, 22, of South Hanover Street, two weeks to file a motion requesting to withdraw his guilty plea to statutory sexual assault.

Monelli was charged by Nanticoke police with having sexual encounters with a 15-year-old girl from June 2017 until December 2017.

Monelli claimed the sexual encounters were consensual and the relationship ended when the minor's parents found out, court records say.

Police also charged Monelli with conspiring with a 17-year-old boy and a 19-year-old girl to steal items from the Turkey Hill on West Main Street, Nanticoke, on May 4. Monelli told the store clerk they would return in one hour to steal cigarettes and other items, and told the clerk to walk to the back of the store, court records say.

After Monelli and the two others left, an officer entered the Turkey Hill and was told about the forthcoming theft.

The officer waited nearby and caught Monelli in a Jeep that had pulled into the store's lot, court records say.

Monelli on Oct. 15 pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit theft and statutory sexual assault.

At Monday's sentencing hearing, Monelli's attorney, Joseph Sklarosky Sr., informed Vough that Monelli claims his innocence on the sexual assault charge.

Assistant District Attorney Cara Solimine said Monelli can file a motion requesting to withdraw his guilty plea.

Vough gave Sklarosky until Jan. 4 to file a motion.

If Vough permits Monelli to withdraw his guilty plea, Monelli will also face a corruption of minors charge, which was withdrawn Oct. 15.

As for the Turkey Hill case, Vough sentenced Monelli to one-year probation and 50 hours of community service.

Charges against the 19-year-old girl who was allegedly involved in the Turkey Hill plan were withdrawn by prosecutors Aug. 21, court records say.

The 17-year-old boy was petitioned to juvenile court.

12/7/2018

Nanticoke man sentenced for drugged-driving crash that hurt 2 in Rice Township

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A Nanticoke man apologized Friday for causing a head-on crash that seriously injured two people when he overdosed on a prescription medication.

"I'm sorry for what I did, it was dumb," Ryan William Hules, 36, of East Grant Street, said at his sentencing hearing.

Hules' lawyer, Robert Levant, said Hules voluntarily committed himself to a drug and alcohol treatment program, and obtained employment soon after he was discharged from a prior job.

Judge David W. Lupas sentenced Hules to three years in the county's Intermediate Punishment Program with the first year on house arrest and electronic monitoring.

The defendant was behind the wheel of a Honda Civic driving erratically and weaving into oncoming traffic when he crashed into a Dodge Ram pickup on Nuangola Road near Gay Avenue in Rice Township on July 8, 2017.

The pickup driver, Paul Ashford, suffered abdominal injuries; a juvenile female passenger suffered a fractured sternum and broken right foot. Hules was trapped in the wrecked Honda and had to be extricated, court records state.

As firefighters removed Hules from the wreckage, an empty pill bottle fell from his body.

Two witnesses told Rice Township police that Hules was driving erratically on Nuangola Road prior to the crash.

Hules' girlfriend, Holly Singer, told police Hules' license was suspended and the Honda had no insurance.

A medical report from Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center indicated Hules suffered a "narcotic overdose."

He told police he was prescribed Tramadol due to a finger laceration and was instructed to take one or two capsules for pain per day. Hules claimed he took four tablets prior to the crash, records say.

Hules did not remember driving to Rice Township after getting gasoline at a station in Nanticoke, authorities report.

He pleaded guilty Sept. 7 to aggravated assault by vehicle while driving under the influence and driving under the influence of a controlled substance. Prosecutors withdrew a second count of aggravated assault while DUI and driving with a suspended license.

Ashford and the juvenile did not appear in court prior to Hules being sentenced.

12/6/2018

Scranton man pleads guilty to murder of good Samaritan; gets life in prison

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Scranton man accused of kidnapping and fatally beating a good Samaritan who offered him a ride has pleaded guilty to murder and sentenced to life in prison.

Bradley John Butler, 43, of 537 Linden St., pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, kidnapping and other offenses and was sentenced to life in prison without parole for brutally killing Nanticoke resident Charles Eget, 64, during the carjacking.

Prosecutors said Eget offered Butler a ride home after they encountered each other outside a diner across from Mohegan Sun Pocono in Plains Twp. the morning of Oct. 20, 2017. Butler then beat and stomped Eget before stuffing him in the trunk and driving to Lebanon County, according to prosecutors.

"My personal view is this guy deserved the death penalty," Lebanon County District Attorney David J. Arnold Jr. said Wednesday. "This is a case, in my mind, that the death penalty was meant for."

Prosecutors debated the case "long and hard" before deciding that, in light of the moratorium on the death penalty in Pennsylvania, the best course of action was the plea deal and a sentence of life in prison, he said. While some of Eget's family members may have wanted the

prosecution to pursue the death penalty, they understood the reason for the decision, he said.

"I think it's a good result, if there can be a good result in a homicide case," Arnold said.

Eget's daughter Jennifer Eget said she thinks the plea deal was the right resolution, given that Butler did not dispute his guilt.

"We accepted that decision because he got the max, and we didn't have to go through a trial," she said. "Our dad would have wanted that for us, considering he wasn't fighting anything."

The charges alleged that after accepting a ride from Charles Eget, Butler diverted him to a secluded spot in Fairmount Twp. and began punching him, taking control of the vehicle.

Charles Eget got upset and began yelling after Butler got into a hit-and-run crash with a construction van, prompting Butler to pull into a private driveway and attack Charles Eget, prosecutors said.

Police said Butler hit Charles Eget with a tire iron and stomped his head, then stuffed him in the trunk before bashing his head several more times with a log.

Butler was caught after the car broke down along Interstate 78 and he told a tow driver he had a body in the trunk. In fact, Charles Eget was still alive at the time — he was taken to Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, where he died about three weeks later, on Nov. 12, 2017.

Explaining the attack to investigators, Butler claimed to have been on methadone and said he panicked after the crash, according to prosecutors.

According to court records, Butler was slated to stand trial on murder charges this month. Instead, he pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, aggravated assault, kidnapping, robbery and other offenses.

Lebanon County Judge Bradford H. Charles sentenced Butler to spend the rest of his life in prison.

Butler is currently serving his sentence at State Correctional Institution Camp Hill.

12/5/2018

Times Leader Police Blotter

Nanticoke man refused to return pickup truck

Township police charged Chris Planutis, 36, on allegations he failed to return a 2015 Ford F-350 pickup to its owner.

According to a criminal complaint:

John Cole told police Aug. 8 that he and Planutis were in business together operating Fat Tire on South River Street in Plains. The business has since closed.

Cole claimed he allowed Planutis to operate the Ford to drive to Exeter and return the same day. Cole told police Planutis failed to return the vehicle and believed Planutis was driving the truck in the Hazleton area.

Planutis, of Nanticoke, was caught driving the Ford in Hazleton later that same day.

He was arraigned Wednesday by District Judge Joseph Carmody in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of unauthorized use of a vehicle and driving with a suspended license. He was released on \$5,000 unsecured bail.

11/30/2018

Murder suspect could face robbery charge

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

With the trial date fast approaching, county prosecutors are seeking to add a robbery charge against murder suspect Antoine McNeal.

McNeal, 34, is set to stand trial Monday on criminal homicide charges alleging he gunned down Brandon Smith, 20, outside his West Church Street, Nanticoke, home on Jan. 18, 2017.

In a motion filed this week, prosecutors say that in a phone call recorded at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility, McNeal indicated that Smith had 30-milligram oxycodone pills in his pocket at the time of the shooting.

"The (expletive) had other drugs in his pocket so evidently someone else was coming to see him besides me," the motion quotes McNeal as saying.

But prosecutors say Smith did not have the pills in his pocket when police found him. That indicates that McNeal robbed Smith of the pills prior to fleeing the scene, says the motion filed by assistant district attorneys William T. Finnegan Jr. and Thomas J. Hogans.

But McNeal's defense counters that adding a robbery charge that McNeal has not had a chance to address at a preliminary hearing violates court rules. The response also says McNeal will be prejudiced if the court allows the addition of a last-minute robbery charge - which could open the door for a second-degree murder case - mere days from the start of trial.

"The sole basis of the commonwealth's amended count of robbery is based upon an alleged statement of the defendant," attorney Demetrius W. Fannick wrote in the filing. "Said statement would be inadmissible as evidence against the defendant without the commonwealth first and independently establishing that a crime of robbery was committed."

The matter is set for a hearing before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley today.

11/29/2018

Nurse who skipped manslaughter sentencing captured

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A registered nurse who skipped her sentencing on a manslaughter charge Wednesday is now behind bars.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 40, of Nanticoke, pleaded guilty in September to involuntary manslaughter over a patient's death and was set to be sentenced Wednesday morning. But Levandowski — who was free on unsecured bail — failed to appear in court, prompting Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough to issue a bench warrant for her arrest.

As of Thursday morning, Levandowski was listed as being in custody at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility. Defense attorney John Pike said she was arrested later Wednesday afternoon and is set to appear before Vough on Friday to address the bench warrant. Sentencing will take place at a later date because a prosecutor from the state Attorney General's Office as well as the victim's family will need to travel from out of town, he said.

Pike said he had not yet spoken to Levandowski and did not know why she missed her sentencing hearing.

Prosecutors alleged Levandowski "intentionally, knowingly or negligently" failed to provide sufficient care to Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at the Guardian Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

The charges said Johnson had a ruptured aneurysm and brain bleeding, and was admitted to Guardian on the day of her death after being removed from a ventilator.

At least four staff members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, they were concerned about Johnson pulling on a breathing tube, but she remained seated at the nursing station, prosecutors said.

At one point when Johnson pulled out the tube, Levandowski reinserted it but she failed to call 911 as required by facility policy, prosecutors said. About a half-hour later, another nurse found Johnson had pulled out the tube and was unresponsive, according to prosecutors.

The charges alleged that Levandowski then instructed a nurse to fill out a form indicating regular 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson, even though they had not been, according to prosecutors.

Levandowski's registered nursing license expired Oct. 31, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State.

11/28/2018

Nurse convicted of manslaughter now a fugitive

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A registered nurse convicted of manslaughter over a patient's death is now a fugitive.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 40, of Nanticoke, failed to appear in court Wednesday to be sentenced for involuntary manslaughter. The charges alleged she "intentionally, knowingly or negligently" failed to provide sufficient care to Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at the Guardian Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

Levandowski was initially charged with neglect of care of a dependant person, a felony charge that carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. But in September she pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter, a misdemeanor offense with a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

She was permitted to remain free on \$25,000 unsecured bail pending sentencing.

In court Wednesday, defense attorney John Pike said Levandowski had recently contacted his office but that he did not know why she was a no-show. Deputy Attorney General Chris Jason requested a bench warrant, noting that Johnson's family from Maryland was present.

"They drove up specifically for the sentencing today," Jason said.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough granted the request, issuing a bench warrant for Levandowski's arrest and revoking her bail.

Authorities began investigating Levandowski after the state Department of Health cited Guardian in 2013 for failing to provide adequate monitoring.

According to prosecutors, Johnson had a ruptured aneurism and brain bleeding, and was admitted to Guardian on the day of her death after being removed from a ventilator.

The charges alleged at least four staff members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, they were concerned about Johnson pulling on a breathing tube. But Levandowski stayed seated at the nursing station, prosecutors said.

At one point when Johnson pulled out the tube, Levandowski reinserted it, but she failed to call 911 as required by facility policy, prosecutors said. About a half-hour later, another nurse found Johnson had pulled out the tube and was unresponsive, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors say Levandowski claimed to have performed CPR until medics arrived, although no one saw her do it. One nurse reported Levandowski directed her to fill out a form indicating regular 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson, even though they had not been, according to prosecutors.

According to Pennsylvania Department of State records, Levandowski's registered nursing license expired Oct. 31.

11/16/2018

Incident: Armed Robbery

Date: November 15, 2018 at 7:30pm

Location: Nardo's Pizza, East Main St. Nanticoke City.



Nanticoke City Police are investigating the report of an armed robbery having occurred on November 15, 2018 at 7:40pm; at Nardozzo's Pizza, East Main St. Nanticoke City.

The armed white male assailant, wearing a black hooded sweatshirt, gray pants and white sneakers attempted to take the money from the cash register. When he became unsuccessful, he demanded a store worker to open it. The assailant got away with an undetermined amount of cash. The male is also described as approximately 6ft with a thin build.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police at 570-735-2200. All call will be kept confidential.

11/14/2018

Nanticoke man faces robbery charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man is facing robbery charges after police said he shoplifted razors and pushed a loss-prevention officer on his way out of Kmart.

Police said loss prevention observed Kyle Benjamin Garbett, 33, of 409 Alden Mountain Road, walking around the store at 18 Mark Plaza on Monday afternoon with two pairs of pants and three sets of razors in a cart.

Surveillance video showed Garbett putting the razors into his jacket before leaving the cart with the pants behind and exiting the store, police said.

A loss-prevention officer confronted Garbett outside the store, but he pushed her and ran to retrieve a backpack from behind the Long John Silver's, police said.

However, a second-loss prevention officer was waiting for Garbett at the levee, and Garbett then agreed to return to the store, police said.

Garbett was found in possession of the stolen razors as well as a hypodermic syringe and three packets of heroin, police said. Garbett was also wanted on a warrant from Lackawanna County, police said.

Police charged Garbett with robbery, retail theft, harassment and drug possession. Magisterial District Judge James J. Haggerty arraigned Garbett on the charges Tuesday morning and set his bail at \$5,000.

Garbett was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with a preliminary hearing set for Nov. 21.

11/14/2018

Mother accused of child endangerment sentenced to jail

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke mother accused of neglecting her son, allowing him to wander into traffic and nearly get hit by a car, has been sentenced to serve up to 23 months in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility.

Tatiana Iesha Moore, 21, previously pleaded guilty to a felony child endangerment charge in the case. Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough sentenced her Friday to serve three to 23 months in the county jail, and to follow all recommendations from Luzerne County Children and Youth Services.

Police charged Moore and her mother, Trisella Denise Hubbard, 42, in May after a passerby spotted the 2-year-old boy in a diaper on April 17, sitting on a curb along busy West Main Street near the intersection with Slope Street.

Moore told police she had been unaware the boy left home, prosecutors said.

Then on May 16, passerby spotted the boy, wearing only a diaper, wandering in the middle of Slope Street in the middle of a rain storm. The woman said she almost hit the boy with her car, prosecutors said.

In that instance, neither Moore nor Hubbard knew the child had left, prosecutors said.

Police charged Moore and Hubbard with child endangerment. While Moore has resolved her case, court records show Hubbard is set to stand trial in January.

She remains free on \$75,000 bail.

11/9/2018

Mother sentenced to prison for endangering toddler found hanging out window

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A Nanticoke woman must serve prison time for endangering a toddler found hanging out a window.

Tatiana Lesha Moore, 21, and her mother, Trisella Denise Hubbard, 42, were charged by Nanticoke police in May on allegations they failed to supervise Moore's 2-year-old boy. He was

found wandering the streets April 17 and May 16, court records show. Police said the boy was also spotted hanging out a second-floor window of their West Main Street residence on May 16.

Moore, who is pregnant, was eligible for the county's Intermediate Punishment Program, a special probationary sentence.

But prosecutor Cara Solimine asked Judge Michael T. Vough to send Moore to jail.

"I don't think IPP is appropriate; incarceration in a prison is more appropriate as her child was hanging out a window," Solimine said.

Vough agreed, sentencing Moore to three to 23 months on a single count of endangering the welfare of children. Moore pleaded guilty to the charge Aug. 2. Moore was given credit for two days time served and was awarded work release upon a request by her attorney, Brian Corcoran.

Moore, dressed in street clothes, was shackled and handcuffed and transported to the county correctional facility.

Court records say it is Moore's second such conviction.

Moore was sentenced November 2017 by Vough to 12 months in the ARD probation program on charges of endangering the welfare of children, disorderly conduct, driving without a license and failure to secure a child in a safety seat.

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Those charges involve a traffic stop by Plymouth police in October 2016, where an officer spotted an approximate 1-year-old boy in Moore's vehicle not secured in a safety seat. Moore shoved the 1-year-old several times as the toddler struck his head against the passenger-side door, court records say.

Co-defendant Hubbard is facing trial in January on a single count of endangering the welfare of children.

A safety plan was put into place by Luzerne County Children & Youth Services when the child was found wondering the streets wearing only a diaper on April 17. The plan called for Hubbard to be the responsible person to supervise the toddler, records state

11/10/2018

Mother sentenced to prison for endangering toddler found hanging out window

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11/7/2018

New Jersey man charged with terrorizing woman in Nanticoke

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City police arrested a New Jersey man on allegations he terrorized an ex-girlfriend at her residence Monday night with a gun that turned out to be a fake.

Police said a search of the woman's residence after Isaac D. McCoy's arrest turned up an Airsoft pistol hidden in a black box.

According to a criminal complaint:

Crystal Circkirillo told police she arrived at her East Ridge Street home when she spotted McCoy emerge from the rear of her house. She recently ended her eight-month relationship with McCoy.

Circkirillo told police he assaulted her last week while she was in Jersey City, N.J.

McCoy approached Circkirillo, asking her to talk inside. She initially refused but opened the door as McCoy walked inside and retrieved what she thought was a black handgun from a duffel bag.

Circkirillo told McCoy she didn't want the gun inside her house. McCoy put the gun above kitchen cabinets.

Circkirillo claimed they argued for some time before she told him she had to leave to meet friends. McCoy stood in a doorway, refusing to let her leave.

After one hour of arguing, McCoy threatened her with the gun and asked her to take him to a bus stop.

Once they got into her vehicle, McCoy punched the dashboard and refused to get out when they arrived at a bus stop on East Main Street.

Circkirillo returned home and walked toward a neighbor's house when McCoy grabbed her, causing her to run and scream for help.

Police arrived and found McCoy outside. He denied a gun was involved in the incident, telling officers he did not carry or own a gun.

A black pistol that turned out to be an Airsoft pellet gun was found in a box in a second floor closet.

Police said McCoy, 30, was wanted by Jersey City, N.J., police on warrants stemming from the alleged assault last week.

McCoy, of Jersey City, was arraigned Tuesday by District Judge Michael Dotzel in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of simple assault, stalking, terroristic threats, false imprisonment and two counts of harassment.

He was jailed at the county lockup for lack of \$1,000 bail. He was further charged with being a fugitive from justice from New Jersey, and held on \$50,000 bail for the fugitive warrants.

10/27/2018

Firefighter convicted for illegal contact with a child

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A former Nanticoke volunteer firefighter accused of sexually abusing an 8-year-old girl was acquitted of rape but convicted Thursday night of having illegal contact with the child.

Michael L. Sansone, 31, was accused of sexually assaulting the girl several times over the year leading up to his arrest in May 2016. He was immediately removed from duty as a volunteer firefighter after being arrested.

According to the charges, the girl told investigators that Sansone forced himself on her several times and tried to make her perform sex acts on him. He also warned her not to tell anyone, prosecutors said.

But after nearly nine hours of deliberations that ended late Thursday night, a jury found Sansone not guilty of rape of a child, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, corruption of a minor and child endangerment. But Sansone was convicted on felony counts of unlawful contact with a minor, corruption of a minor and child endangerment.

Sansone's attorney, Thomas S. Cometa, could not be immediately reached for comment Friday.

Court documents show after the verdict, prosecutors sought revocation of Sansone's \$250,000 bail, a motion that Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough denied.

Sansone was allowed to apply for the Intermediate Punishment Program and was directed to report back for sentencing at 9 a.m. Jan. 25.

10/20/2018

Child molester gets probation

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man who did not dispute charges alleging he molested two young girls was sentenced Friday to four years of probation.

Jeffrey David Heiser, 58, of 508 E. Main St., will also have to register as a sex offender for 15 years as a result of his no contest plea to two counts of indecent assault.

According to prosecutors, two sisters, ages 11 and 12, came forward and reported Heiser had been touching them inappropriately at his apartment.

One girl told police while she was over a friend's home in September 2016, Heiser, the friend's father, told her to "come here" while he was in his bedroom.

Heiser then grabbed the girl, causing her to land on top of him and on his bed, prosecutors said. Heiser then put his hands down the girl's pants, prosecutors said.

The girl reported Heiser fondled her on more than one occasion, both with his hands under and over her clothing.

The other sister told police that while she was at his house playing Heiser had on more than one occasion pulled her to him and groped her privates, prosecutors said.

At one point Heiser tried to put his hands under her clothing, but the girl pushed him away, according to prosecutors.

"What, don't you love me anymore?" Heiser was alleged to have said.

In May, Heiser pleaded no contest to two misdemeanor counts of indecent assault of a person under 13.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough sentenced Heiser on Friday to two consecutive two-year terms of probation and ordered him to have no contact with the victims.

The judge also ordered Heiser to have no unsupervised contact with minors except for his grandchildren.

10/14/2018

Appeals court issues opinion on Nanticoke man's lifetime internet ban

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals has issued a precedent-setting opinion that a lifetime internet ban for a Nanticoke man convicted of online enticement was overly broad.

The court wrote in its opinion last week that Branden Holena, 32, should be restricted from unfettered internet access, but that a blanket lifetime ban runs afoul of his right to free speech.

"Holena poses a danger to children, so the District Court may, and should, limit his liberty accordingly," the judges wrote. "But his supervised release must still be tailored to the danger that he poses. Holena's current conditions fail that test. They contradict one another. They also sweep too broadly, preventing him from reading the news or shopping online. And they limit his First Amendment freedoms beyond what is reasonably necessary or appropriate."

Holena was accused of visiting an online chat room and trying to entice a 14-year-old boy to have sex with him. However, the boy was actually an undercover FBI agent, and he was charged with attempting to entice a minor to engage in sex acts.

Holena pleaded guilty, and U.S. District Judge Edwin M. Kosik sentenced him in June 2008 to 10 years in prison with a lifetime of supervision, during which he was banned from using the internet without his probation officer's approval.

But after being released from prison, Holena twice violated his probation by going onto social media and answering emails. He was sentenced to an additional nine months in prison for each violation.

After the second offense, U.S. District Judge Matthew W. Brann in November 2017 imposed a lifetime ban on using computers or electronic communications devices as well as a lifetime ban on accessing the internet.

Holena then objected to the bans, which the appeals court found "both contradictory and more restrictive than necessary."

In its opinion, the court described internet bans in general as "draconian" and said the length and coverage of the computer ban for Holena is "excessive."

The court noted it has never upheld a lifetime internet ban in a precedent-setting opinion, saying it is hard to imagine how anyone could function in modern society with a lifetime ban on computer use.

The sentence barred Holena from even possessing a cellphone that did not have internet access, preventing him from doing everyday tasks such as calling someone for a ride, the judges noted. He was also barred from accessing the internet at all, even for sites where Holena could not interact with others or view explicit materials.

The judges noted the goal is to prevent Holena from preying upon children, and said the restrictions must be tailored to that end. As a result, the judges found the blanket ban on electronic devices and internet access too broad.

"Both Holena's computer ban and internet ban limit an array of First Amendment activity," the judges wrote. "And none of that activity is related to his crime. Thus, many of the restrictions on his speech are not making the public safer."

The judges sent the case back to the district court for a new revocation hearing.

Records show Holena is under the supervision of the federal Bureau of Prisons' Residential Reentry Management facility in Philadelphia.

10/11/2018

Police: Woman assaults ex-boyfriend with teapot

Times Leader

City police arrested Felicia Marie Dzoch, 23, after her ex-boyfriend claimed she struck him in the head with a teapot during a domestic dispute early Wednesday.

According to a criminal complaint:

John Sulkowski told police he was involved in an argument with his soon-to-be ex-girlfriend, Dzoch, inside a residence on South Hanover Street. Sulkowski left the residence but returned later to discover Dzoch moved items inside the house.

Sulkowski and Dzoch argued about her moving the items.

Sulkowski told police he wanted to leave but Dzoch blocked his way. He put his hands on her wrist to move her when she allegedly struck him in the head with a teapot.

Police said Sulkowski suffered injuries to his face.

Dzoch, of South Hanover Street, Nanticoke, was arraigned by District Judge Ferris Webby in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of simple assault and harassment. She was released on \$10,000 unsecured bail.

10/2/2018

Charges of weapons on school property dismissed against Nanticoke teen

elewis@timesleader.com

A Nanticoke teenager who faced a trial in Luzerne County Court on allegations he had axes and knives inside his car parked on school property had the charges dismissed Friday.

District Judge Thomas Malloy of Wilkes-Barre presiding in Central Court dismissed four counts of possession of weapons on school property against Dylan Jeffrey White.

White's attorney, Theron J. Solomon of the Dyller Law Firm, said there was no evidence presented at the hearing.

"Judge Malloy is a fair judge and he made the correct decision," Solomon said.

White's criminal case has bounced between district court and county court since his arrest Feb. 22 by Nanticoke police.

According to court records:

White, 19, of West South Street, was charged after Greater Nanticoke Area school resource officer Ray Whittaker spotted an ax with a 35-inch handle on the passenger side floor of a Mazda Protege parked in the rear parking lot near the gymnasium. The vehicle was registered with a school parking permit to White. Police searched the vehicle and allegedly found an 11-inch knife in the glove box, a fully extended 9-inch knife in the console and a 13-inch hatchet under the driver's seat. White, then 18, was initially charged Feb. 22. When White was represented by a court-appointed lawyer, he waived his right to a preliminary hearing in February, sending the charges to county court. A trial was scheduled for June before Judge Michael Vough. In May, White privately hired Solomon who filed a petition to have the case sent back to district court for a preliminary hearing, which was held Friday.

9/28/2018

Alleged juvenile rapist will be tried as adult

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For the first time, an alleged juvenile rapist is being tried as an adult in Luzerne County, according to prosecutors. Arnold Balz, now 18, of 28 Coal St., is accused of choking and raping a 15-year-old girl in his bedroom after school in February. Balz was 17 at the time of the assault and was initially charged as a juvenile, but prosecutors successfully got the case transferred to adult court. "There were multiple factors in this defendant's history that led us to believe that he would be incapable of rehabilitation in the juvenile system," Assistant District Attorney Cara Solimine said. "Coupled with the serious nature of the crimes alleged, the office felt we had no choice but to move him to the adult system." According to the complaint, the girl agreed to go home with Balz the afternoon of Feb. 6 while she waited for her friend's mother to get home. The girl told police she believes Balz's mother was in the kitchen, but that she and Balz went upstairs to watch television. The girl laid down on Balz's bed while texting a friend, but then Balz began asking her to perform sexual acts on him, the complaint says. The charges say Balz began choking the girl with one hand and bit her neck before getting on top of her. Balz pulled the girl's pants down and raped her as he choked her, while the girl told him she didn't want to have sex, the complaint says. Afterward, the girl began crying and "freaking out" because Balz had not used a condom, police said. Balz responded by yelling, "I have a job. I can take care of it," the complaint says. The girl told Balz she doesn't want a child and left the house, according to police. She went to a friend's house and reported the assault to her friends and stepmother, according to the complaint. Her stepmother took her to Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Twp. for an examination. During questioning, Balz acknowledged having intercourse with the girl but he maintained it was consensual, police said. He also admitted putting his hand on her throat, but maintained he did not do it hard, police said. Investigators charged Balz with forcible rape, sexual assault, indecent assault and strangulation. At a bail hearing Thursday, Luzerne County Judge William H. Amesbury released Balz on \$80,000 unsecured bail over the objection of the prosecution.

9/28/2018

Judge sentences man to state prison on child sex charges

elewis@timesleader.com

A man who admitted to sexually assaulting a teen girl in Nanticoke continued to contact the victim, the girl's mother told a Luzerne County judge on Friday. Jeremiah Calk, 31, also expressed his intentions of having a relationship with the girl, hoping they run away together when he is released from prison, court records say. "He is pursuing my daughter, he wants to have a relationship with her," the girl's mother told Judge Michael T. Vough. "If he is released, he's going to do the same to another child. I want him to stop contacting my daughter." When Calk acknowledged he was aware the girl was a teenager and attempted to explain his intentions, Vough shut him down. "Stop right there," Vough told Calk. "Did you know she was 14?" "Yes sir," Calk said. Vough scolded Calk for contacting the girl, warning him, "You can't contact her ever again." Calk appeared before Vough to be sentenced on charges of statutory sexual assault and corruption of minors. He pleaded guilty to the charges July 12. After the reprimand by Vough, Calk learned he will serve 69-to-138 months in state prison. Calk is also subject to lifetime registration with law enforcement authorities under the state's Megan's Law. Nanticoke police arrested Calk in May after the girl and her mother reported the allegations in March. The girl was questioned by a forensic interviewer at the Luzerne County Children's Advocacy Center. She told the interviewer Calk would assault her "every single night." Calk blamed his actions on an abusive childhood in Texas where he claimed he was sexually assaulted. "I know words will never be enough but I'm truly sorry," Calk said. The girl and her mother in April were awarded a protection-from-abuse order against Calk, who was court ordered not to have any contact with them. The restraining order expires in April 2021.

In her PFA application, the mother claimed Calk emailed her a picture of a handgun and bullets.

9/27/2018

Nanticoke police file charges against two contractors

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

City police have arrested two contractors for home improvement fraud, alleging they accepted advance payment for work they never completed.

Jason Verdekal, 35, of North Main Street, Mountain Top, was arraigned Wednesday in front of Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker. Police issued an arrest warrant for another contractor, John Covine, of Tioga.

Investigators accuse Verdekal, operating as JV Construction, of taking a \$4,000 deposit in July to start work on a roof for a Nanticoke couple. However, they say he only worked one day and ignored repeated calls from the couple.

Police said Verdekal later had a friend get a building permit and forged the homeowner's signature on a new work agreement in September. Verdekal is charged with two counts of home improvement fraud, forgery and identity theft. He was released on \$25,000 unsecured bail. A preliminary hearing is set for Oct. 10.

Police say Covine, 46, of J.C. and Sons Home Improvements, signed an agreement in December to repair a roof and replace gutters in Nanticoke and accepted a \$2,600 down payment.

When the homeowner called Covine three months later, Covine pretended not to know who the caller was, police said.

After the homeowner said he was going to police, Covine agreed to start work May 1, but never did, police said.

Investigators said they have tried to contact Covine, but have been unsuccessful. He is charged with home improvement fraud and theft.

9/27/2018

Defense seeks to suppress phone evidence in Nanticoke homicide

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The defense in a 2017 homicide is looking to suppress evidence gleaned from cell phones by state police investigating the case.

Antoine McNeal, 34, appeared in court on Wednesday before Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley. McNeal is accused of fatally shooting Brandon Smith, 20, while Smith sat in a van outside a Nanticoke home on Jan. 18, 2017.

Thursday's hearing centered around a trio of cell phones taken into evidence after Smith's death.

Trooper Edward Urban testified at the hearing, saying one cell phone, a flip phone identified to be Smith's, was recovered from the van Smith was shot in.

Two more cell phones were also found in the van. Both were smart phones; one was identified as being Smith's, and the other was discovered to belong to Wakeelah Moore, McNeal's girlfriend.

But it's the ways in which the phones were identified and what was done with them afterward that Demetrius Fannick, McNeal's attorney, took issue with.

After Smith's death, investigators turned his flip phone on and saw he had been texting with an unknown number in the pursuance of setting up a drug deal, Urban said.

The other phone was identified when investigators called the unknown phone number, and the phone began ringing.

Fannick argued that investigators did not have either a warrant or permission from Smith - since he was dead - to go through the phone, and made a similar argument about the smart phone.

"You do not have a warrant, you do not have consent, and you made a decision to power on the phone to get information about the number of the phone," Fannick said to Urban. "Is that fair to say?"

"Fair to say," Urban's answer came.

Urban said there was no further investigation of the phone until after a search warrant was procured.

Gartley is giving the defense time to file a further brief, explaining why they believe the phone evidence should be suppressed. Fannick said he likely could have the brief filed by next Friday. Prosecutors would then have 10 days to respond.

9/26/2018

Nanticoke man had THC vials, marijuana and marijuana butter

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Police say they seized drugs and other items with a street value of more than \$20,000 during a narcotics bust Tuesday afternoon.

Richard J. Simon Jr., 33, of West Main Street, Nanticoke, was arrested at approximately 1:45 p.m. on the Sans Souci Parkway.

Hanover Township officers say a search of Simon's vehicle turned up marijuana, \$2,350 in cash, a cell phone, 66 vials of THC, and new and unused vape kits with THC vials. THC is the main psychoactive compound in marijuana.

A search was also conducted at Simon's home, where police said they recovered 96 vials of THC, 3.5 pounds of marijuana, three-quarters of a pound of marijuana butter, a digital scale, shrink-wrap baggies, a shrink-wrap machine, plastic baggies, new or unused vape kits and more cash.

Marijuana butter is used to make pot-laced brownies and other such snacks, according to online information.

Simon was arraigned by District Judge Daniel O'Donnell and his charges include three felony counts of possession with the intent to deliver a controlled substance. He's also accused of possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

He was remanded to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$25,000 bail.

9/25/2018

Nanticoke nurse pleads guilty to manslaughter

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A registered nurse whose patient died under her care pleaded guilty Monday to involuntary manslaughter.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 40, of Nanticoke, was accused of “intentionally, knowingly or negligently” failing to provide sufficient care to Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at the Guardian Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

Levandowski was initially charged with neglect of care of a dependant person, a felony charge that carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. The involuntary manslaughter charge she admitted to is a misdemeanor offense with a maximum penalty of five years in prison.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough accepted the plea and set sentencing for Nov. 28.

According to prosecutors, authorities began investigating Levandowski after the state Department of Health cited Guardian in 2013 for failing to provide adequate monitoring over the incident.

Prosecutors said Johnson had sustained a ruptured aneurism and brain bleeding, and was admitted to Guardian on the day of her death after being removed from a ventilator.

The charges alleged at least four staff members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, they were concerned about Johnson pulling on a breathing tube. But Levandowski stayed seated at the nursing station, prosecutors said.

At one point when Johnson pulled out the tube, Levandowski reinserted it — but failed to call 911 as required by facility policy, prosecutors said. About a half-hour later, another nurse found Johnson unresponsive, having again removed the tube, according to prosecutors.

Levandowski claimed to have performed CPR until medics arrived, but no other staff members saw her do so, prosecutors said. One nurse reported Levandowski directed her to fill out a form indicating regular 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson, even though they had not been, the charges alleged.

Levandowski has been free on \$25,000 unsecured bail since her arrest in January. She remains a licensed registered nurse, although state records show her license expires Oct. 31.

9/13/2018

Man arraigned in Nanticoke school burglary

elewis@timesleader.com

A man who allegedly burglarized Greater Nanticoke Area High School and stole computers valued at more than \$33,100 in June 2016 was arraigned Wednesday in Luzerne County Central Court.

Police said Enrique Bacilio, 21, last known address as Midland Court, Wilkes-Barre, ransacked two classrooms, stealing 57 HP ProBook notebooks.

Police said the burglary occurred between 11 p.m. June 22, 2016, and 7 a.m. June 23, 2016.

Bacilio entered the school by smashing a window, court records say.

Police said Bacilio was identified as the suspect when his fingerprints were found on broken glass. An arrest warrant was issued April 11, 2017.

Police said another person, who is not named, attempted to sell the stolen computers to family members and at a pawn shop in Wilkes-Barre.

Police did not say where Bacilio was arrested. He formerly resided in Texas and New York before relocating to Wilkes-Barre.

Bacilio was arraigned by District Judge Thomas Malloy on charges of burglary, theft, criminal trespass and criminal mischief. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$20,000 bail.

9/13/2018

Man accused of burglarizing Nanticoke school captured in Texas

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Police said they have captured the man accused of burglarizing Greater Nanticoke Area High School in 2016 to steal 57 laptop computers. Enrique Bacilio, 21, who was identified as the suspect in April 2017, was recently taken into custody in Texas, police said.

He was arraigned Wednesday on charges of burglary, theft, trespass, and criminal mischief. Bacilio was arraigned by on-duty Magisterial District Judge Thomas Malloy, who ordered Bacilio jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$20,000 cash bail.

Investigators said Bacilio smashed two windows to gain entry into the school and stole computers from two classrooms. The burglary occurred some time between 11 p.m. June 22 and 7 a.m. June 23.

The computers were valued at \$33,174.

Police said they were able to obtain fingerprints from broken glass. State police later identified Bacilio as the suspect from the fingerprints, police said.

Investigators said one of Bacilio's co-defendants in another case was released from prison at 5 p.m. on June 22, hours before the burglary.

That co-defendant reportedly later tried to sell large quantities of computers - the same models as the ones stolen from Nanticoke Area - to family members and a Wilkes-Barre pawn shop, police said.

Police said Bacilio, a New York resident known to stay at an apartment on Midland Court in Wilkes-Barre, never attended Greater Nanticoke Area.

Nanticoke police had arrested Bacilio for an unrelated burglary a month before the school break in.

9/10/2018

Nanticoke woman charged in W-B stabbing

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke woman stabbed an Edwardsville woman during a dispute in Wilkes-Barre last week, according to police. Estafania Duran, 27, was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault and reckless endangerment based on the Sept. 2 incident, at about 8:30 p.m. in the area of Eastview Drive, police said in a news release. Officers filed charges against Duran after they responded to a local medical facility for a reported stabbing and spoke with the 23-year-old victim, the news release states.

9/8/2018

**Nanticoke City Police
Facebook Press Release**

September 8, 2018

Offense Type: Narcotics Trafficking
Location: West Green St. Nanticoke City
Date: August 15, 2018 (Delay in press release was due to ongoing investigations)
Time: 3:30 pm
Subject: Merle Gommer III, 36 yrs., of West Green Street, Nanticoke, Pa
Incident Details:

A joint narcotics operation was conducted with the Pa Office Of Attorney General/BNI Region 8 assisted by the Nanticoke City/Hanover Township Narcotics Unit and Drug Task Force officers that led to a Search Warrant and arrest of a subject in Nanticoke, City, Pa. A search warrant was served at approx. 3:30 pm hours, on August 15, 2018, on West Green Street, Nanticoke, and the subject, Merle Gommer, was taken into custody. Narcotics officers seized, a Ruger .22 semi-auto handgun, crystal meth, heroin, marihuana, LSD hits, steroids, large assortment of pills/tablets, U.S. Currency and drug paraphernalia utilized in the trafficking of narcotics. Street value of the narcotics is approximately \$10,000.00.

Charges:

Delivery of Schedule Controlled Substance, Crystal Meth

Poss with the Intent to Deliver Crystal Meth, marihuana, heroin/fentanyl, Possession of a Controlled Substance, Crystal Meth, marihuana, heroin/fentanyl

The subject was arraigned before District Magistrate Whitaker and bail was set at \$150,000.00. The subject was transported to the Luzerne County Prison.

8/30/2018

Parking lot chase ends with woman's arrest in Hanover Township

elewis@timesleader.com

A woman wanted by several area police departments on a variety of criminal offenses was captured after she attempted to run away from township officers, according to court records.

Heather Marie Rittenhouse, 32, of Orchard Street, Nanticoke, was arraigned Thursday on a list of charges filed by police in Hanover Township, Wilkes-Barre and Wilkes-Barre Township.

Rittenhouse was captured when township police responded to Dollar General in the Hanover Mall Complex on Sans Souci Parkway for a suspicious woman inside the store Tuesday night.

Rittenhouse ran through the parking lot when police learned she was wanted by other police departments, court records say.

Before running, Rittenhouse used a friend's name to identify herself, police said.

When police learned Rittenhouse's true identity, she stood up and allegedly ran through the parking lot. Two officers chased and deployed Tasers where there unsuccessful.

An officer caught up to Rittenhouse during the foot chase.

Police charged Rittenhouse with flight to avoid apprehension, resisting arrest, false identification to law enforcement and disorderly conduct after Tuesday's alleged incident at Dollar General.

Court records say:

April 13: Wilkes-Barre police alleged Rittenhouse stole a shotgun from a residence on Freeman Street where she formerly resided. While gathering personal belongings, Rittenhouse concealed the shotgun in her clothing. Police charged Rittenhouse with theft and harassment. Top Searches

April 12: Wilkes-Barre Township police arrested Rittenhouse after she allegedly used her sister's name to identify herself after she was detained stealing items at Walmart Supercenter, Highland Park Boulevard. She was charged with false report to law enforcement, retail theft, flight to avoid apprehension, false identification to law enforcement and identity theft.

April 8: Wilkes-Barre police alleged Rittenhouse was inside a coffee restaurant on Public Square, attempting to sell jewelry stolen from her former residence on Freeman Street. Police alleged they found stolen jewelry, Suboxone and a syringe in her purse. Police charged her with receiving stolen property, misbranding a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia. Rittenhouse was arraigned by District Judge Ferris Webby in Luzerne County Central Court and jailed at the \$40,000 total bail.

8/15/2018

LCCC employee wanted on theft charges to be arraigned

nrossi@citizensvoice.com

A Nanticoke woman is wanted on several charges related to multiple thefts at Luzerne County Community College. Melissa Sue Taney of Berwick is scheduled to surrender herself for arraignment at 9:30 a.m. today before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

According to officers, police received a call from Bill Barrett, the head of security for Luzerne County Community College. Barrett revealed it had been brought to his attention that an employee, Melissa Sue Taney, was stealing money generated by services provided by students at the school's dental clinic, police said.

According to the affidavit, Taney is a receptionist at the school's dental building at 38 E. Main St. Taney allegedly took money that should've been forwarded to the main campus to be deposited into the college's bank account, police said.

Police received this information from Rachel Coffee, director of the dental clinic, who realized there was a discrepancy with the money received at the clinic and the deposits made at the main campus.

Coffee realized there was an issue while she was working one day when Taney was off. Coffee went to the safe to get money to make change available. But, when she opened the safe it was empty, police said. The next day, Coffee questioned Taney about the missing money, to which Taney replied she had a secret hiding spot where she put the money, according to the affidavit. Coffee immediately told her to stop this practice and put the money in the safe where it belongs, according to police.

Not comfortable with the answer from Taney, Coffee began to look over patient logs and the deposits and she found numerous discrepancies, as well as altered deposit sheets changed to reflect the amount Taney deposited, police said.

According to the criminal complaint, Coffee took her findings to her superiors as well as grant applications submitted by the school, which had also been tampered with. The school depends on grants and donations from many sources.

Robert Linskey, director of accounts and finance, in February performed an audit for Jan. 1, 2016 to Sept. 30, 2017. According to the criminal complaint, Linskey found a deficit of \$7,789 based on the actual dental services performed by LCCC students versus what was reported. Taney is facing multiple theft charges, as well as receiving stolen property, tampering with records or identification and tampering with public records and information.

8/7/2018

Nanticoke man charged with rape, assault

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man faces rape and assault charges in connection with an alleged sexual assault that occurred on West Church Street. Peter Nicholas Kolacz, 32, is charged with rape, aggravated indecent assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, sexual assault, indecent assault, aggravated assault, simple assault, unlawful restraint and strangulation.

Arrest papers say Kolacz forced himself on a woman while covering her mouth and nose to keep her from breathing. At one point, he put her in a "choke hold," police said.

The incident allegedly occurred in April and Kolacz was arraigned on the charges in late July.

Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker ordered Kolacz jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$250,000 bail.

8/7/2018

Police: Woman charged for drug possession destroyed handcuffs

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

An associate of Laflin arson suspect Preston Daquen Bonnett was charged Monday with possessing crack-cocaine and destroying a pair of handcuffs, according to police.

Police said Tyla Marie Griffin, 29, of 267 E. Green St., Nanticoke, was found in possession of a bag of crack during a traffic stop in the area of 250 Pierce St. around 2:40 a.m. Monday.

After being taken to police headquarters, Griffin removed a glass crack pipe from her pants and tried to hide it in a hole on a bench, according to police.

When police found the pipe, Griffin became aggressive and threw a transport belt and handcuffs against a wall, breaking the handcuffs, police said. The damage was estimated at \$46.

Police charged Griffin with institutional vandalism, tampering with evidence, possession of drug paraphernalia and drug possession. She was being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$100,000.

Griffin previously made news after being charged along with Bonnett, 27, with access device fraud and conspiracy for possessing materials used to make fraudulent credit cards.

The materials were discovered when Bonnett's ex-girlfriend kicked the pair out of her Laflin house last summer. Prosecutors allege Bonnett returned in October and torched the home, killing the ex-girlfriend's three children, Erik Dupree, 16, Devon Major, 12, and Ezekiel Major, 7. Bonnett is awaiting trial on murder and arson charges.

Griffin was not charged in connection with the fire, but she did plead guilty to a felony count of conspiring to possess a counterfeit access device and a misdemeanor count of illegal device-making equipment possession.

Luzerne County Judge Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr. sentenced Griffin in February to two years in the Intermediate Punishment Program.

8/4/2018

Charges of weapons on school property dismissed against Nanticoke teen

elewis@timesleader.com

A Nanticoke teenager who faced a trial in Luzerne County Court on allegations he had axes and knives inside his car parked on school property had the charges dismissed Friday.

District Judge Thomas Malloy of Wilkes-Barre presiding in Central Court dismissed four counts of possession of weapons on school property against Dylan Jeffrey White.

White's attorney, Theron J. Solomon of the Dyller Law Firm, said there was no evidence presented at the hearing.

"Judge Malloy is a fair judge and he made the correct decision," Solomon said.

White's criminal case has bounced between district court and county court since his arrest Feb. 22 by Nanticoke police.

According to court records:

White, 19, of West South Street, was charged after Greater Nanticoke Area school resource officer Ray Whittaker spotted an ax with a 35-inch handle on the passenger side floor of a Mazda Protege parked in the rear parking lot near the gymnasium.

The vehicle was registered with a school parking permit to White.

Police searched the vehicle and allegedly found an 11-inch knife in the glove box, a fully extended 9-inch knife in the console and a 13-inch hatchet under the driver's seat.

White, then 18, was initially charged Feb. 22.

When White was represented by a court-appointed lawyer, he waived his right to a preliminary hearing in February, sending the charges to county court.

A trial was scheduled for June before Judge Michael Vough.

In May, White privately hired Solomon who filed a petition to have the case sent back to district court for a preliminary hearing, which was held Friday.

7/16/2018

Standoff ends peacefully in Nanticoke

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A man surrendered peacefully after a domestic disturbance turned into a standoff with police on Sunday in Nanticoke.

Officers took Richard J. Simon Jr. into custody shortly before 2 p.m. Sunday after he walked out of his residence at 12 Honey Pot St., where he had barricaded himself for more than an hour after he assaulted and threatened his live-in girlfriend, according to police.

Officers responded to a reported domestic assault at the home at 12:26 p.m. Sunday, according to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke police.

Responding officers spoke with the victim of the alleged assault. She said that on Saturday night she called Simon and confronted him about naked pictures of a woman she found on his phone.

Simon responded "I don't want you" and did not come home Saturday night, the woman told police.

She said that when Simon came home at 11 a.m. Sunday she told him "get your (stuff) and leave," after which Simon slapped her face, shoved her to the ground and began to choke her.

The woman said she almost passed out before she escaped the physical assault. She again told Simon to leave, after which he pulled a handgun from a back pocket, aimed it at her face and said "if you call the cops I'll kill you," the complaint states.

The woman said that when Simon went to the basement, she grabbed her children and ran out of the house to a safe location. Officers observed red marks on her neck, consistent with her account of the assault, according to the complaint.

Police set up a perimeter and evacuated residents of a separate apartment in the building. They attempted to reach Simon on his cell phone, but it went straight to voice mail, the complaint states.

A friend of Simon's managed to reach him by phone, and police convinced Simon to surrender, according to Nanticoke police Chief Thomas Wall. No one was injured, Wall said.

Simon was not armed when he surrendered, but officers found a handgun when they searched his home, according to Wall.

Simon, 33, was charged with a felony count of aggravated assault and misdemeanor counts of simple assault, terroristic threats, reckless endangerment and stalking.

He was arraigned Sunday and sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$50,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for July 25 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

Police from Nanticoke, Hanover Twp., Sugar Notch, Rice Twp. and Newport Twp. responded, as did state police, according to Wall.

Wall said he was happy the potentially deadly incident ended peacefully, with no one seriously hurt and the suspect alive and in custody.

"Any time they end this way it's a home run," he said.

7/5/2018

Police: Man robs Turkey Hill after he, girlfriend gambled rent money

Steve Mocarsky - Citizens Voice

City police arrested a man they say committed an armed robbery after he and his girlfriend gambled away their rent money at a casino.

Joshua Love, 30, of East Kirmar Avenue, Newport Twp., faces charges of robbery, theft by unlawful taking, terroristic threats and simple assault.

Police say Love entered the Turkey Hill Minit Market at 460 W. Main St., Nanticoke, at 3:55 a.m. June 23, jumped over the counter and demanded money from the cash register while holding a large kitchen knife. He then allegedly fled on foot on Alden Road.

In a criminal complaint, police say Love also took money from a "purported patron" before leaving the store. And although a clerk asked the female patron to wait for police, she left the store soon after Love.

The following day, police received information on the female patron, whom they located and interviewed. The woman allegedly told them she was serving as a lookout in the store for Love, who was her boyfriend.

Police then located Love, who allegedly told them he and his girlfriend were at a casino, drank alcohol, became intoxicated, gambled and lost

their rent money.

Love then allegedly admitted to going to the store and committing the robbery, with his girlfriend serving as a lookout.

Love was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Spagnuolo and, unable to post \$100,000 bail, was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility to await a preliminary hearing scheduled for 10:30 a.m. July 18 before District Judge Donald Whitaker.

7/4/2018

Man accused of beating girlfriend

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Mocanaqua man accused of beating his girlfriend spit on police and punched a medic treating him for a nose bleed, according to police. Matthew J. Houseknecht, 29, of 136 Italy St., had to be stunned with a Taser after he began kicking and spitting at police, the charges allege. According to a police affidavit, officers were called to 113 W. Green St. around 10:20 p.m. Monday to a report of a domestic dispute.

Houseknecht's girlfriend, Beth Lewis, told police they had been arguing about spending intimate time together when Houseknecht, who had consumed most of a bottle of peach schnapps, got irate.

Houseknecht began throwing and smashing things, and pushed Lewis to the ground before getting on top of her and punching her in the face, police said.

Officers arrested Houseknecht, who then asked for a tissue because of a nose bleed, the complaint said. Informed that police did not have any tissues, Houseknecht asked for permission to get down and blow his nose into the grass, according to police.

When that request was denied, Houseknecht "flipped out" and asked if police wanted him to bleed all over the car, the complaint said.

Houseknecht, who informed police he has hepatitis C, then turned around and spit in the face of Officer Bryan Kata, according to police.

As Kata tried to hold Houseknecht and stop him from spitting, Houseknecht again spit on the officer and tried to blow the bloody discharge from his nose onto him, the complaint alleges.

Kata then brought Houseknecht to the ground, police said. During the ensuing struggle, Houseknecht kicked Kata in the side before another officer, Joseph Buchalski, used a Taser to subdue him, the charges allege.

Police said Houseknecht then calmed down until after he was loaded into an ambulance to be taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital. En route, Houseknecht started to act up again, hitting medic Ryan Panetta on the arm and leg, police said.

Once at the hospital, Houseknecht again spit on police, the complaint said.

Police charged Houseknecht with aggravated assault, simple assault, resisting arrest and harassment. Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. arraigned Houseknecht on Tuesday morning and ordered him jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$100,000.

A preliminary hearing was set for July 11.

7/3/2018

Police: Pair passed fake cash at grocery store

Amanda Christman - Citizens Voice

Sugarloaf Twp. police apprehended two people after fake money was passed at a township grocery store June 9.

Erica Altomose, 24, of Nanticoke, was charged with two felony counts of forgery along with one felony conspiracy count and one misdemeanor for theft while Jeremy Bulford, 27, of Duryea, faces a felony for conspiracy at forgery and a misdemeanor for conspiracy at theft.

Altomose was released on \$35,000 unsecured bail Friday by Magisterial District Judge Joseph Zola, Hazleton, and Bulford was released on the same bail by Magisterial District Judge Daniel O'Donnell, Sugarloaf Twp., on Monday.

The charges were filed against them June 14 by Sugarloaf Twp. police.

Township police were called to Gould's Supermarket, 669 Route 93, at 4:13 p.m. for a woman who fled the business after a robbery and assault against a cashier.

When a township officer arrived, she found a Pennsylvania State Police Trooper followed Altomose out of the store and detained her.

Police said Altomose was stopped by a cashier after passing two bogus \$100 bills. Once apprehended, Altomose claimed Bulford asked her to pay for \$25 gift cards with separate \$100 counterfeit notes.

She said she was staying at Bulford's apartment at 1601 Airport Road in Hazle Twp., for about a month and that day he drove her to the store and asked her to make the purchase, according to police. He told her how much he cared for her and though Altomose questioned the legitimacy of the bills, she used them anyway, court papers state.

Altomose had two \$25 gift cards in her possession, a New York state identification card, \$146 wrapped in two receipts for the gift cards she bought with the funny money and one fake \$100 bill, arrest papers state.

7/3/2018

Kids sought in pizzeria fireworks prank

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A group of juveniles lit off fireworks inside a Nanticoke pizza restaurant Sunday, filling the business with smoke and clearing it of customers, the business owner said.

The incident unfolded around 7 p.m. inside Antonio's Pizza at 204 E. Main St.

"What happened: They came in. They went to the bathroom. They got some free water. We have a container of free spring water. I guess they went into the corner and lit it up and ran," Luigi Carannante, the owner, said Monday. "There was a lot of smoke."

The juveniles then fled on bicycles.

Nanticoke's police and fire departments responded to the incident.

Debris from the exploding fireworks marred the windows and walls of the business and damaged a carpet, Carannante said. The business resumed operations when the smoke cleared.

"There were some burn marks, scorch marks on the walls. But they didn't have to extinguish anything," said Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton.

Nanticoke police Chief Tom Wall said the department was investigating. Anyone with information can call city police at 570-735-4000.

Antonio's has been a fixture of Nanticoke since 1982, having moved to its current location from the former Colonial Village more than 18 years ago.

"We're glad no one was hurt," Carannante said.

6/27/2018

Man pleads guilty to sex assault, assault charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Monroe County man accused of beating a woman and forcing her to perform oral sex on him in front of three young children pleaded guilty Tuesday to a felony sex offense.

Deon Hosmond Blair, 27, of Henryville, pleaded guilty to a count of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with forcible compulsion and a misdemeanor count of simple assault. Prosecutors dropped additional charges against Blair in exchange for the plea.

According to the charges, police responded to a home on East Green Street, Nanticoke, the night of Jan. 15 after a friend of the victim's reported she was being held against her will and had been physically and sexually assaulted.

Police arrived at the apartment to find the victim with swollen and bruised cheeks and a cut on the top of her head, according to prosecutors. Blair tried telling the officers there was no problem and asked them to leave, but the woman reported Blair had been slapping and punching her earlier in the evening, prosecutors said.

The woman also told police Blair had forced her to perform oral sex in a bedroom in front of three children, ages 2, 1 and 3 months, prosecutors said.

Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough accepted Blair's plea Tuesday and ordered him held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility pending sentencing on Sept. 28.

Blair will be required to undergo a sex offender evaluation prior to sentencing.

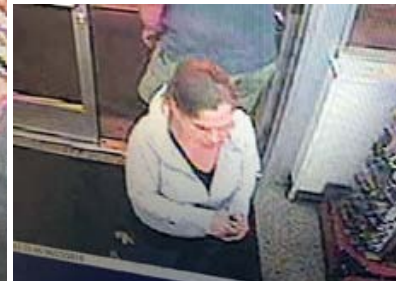
6/23/2018

PRESS RELEASE

Incident: Armed Robbery

Location: Turkey Hill Minit Mart, 460 West Main St. Nanticoke City

Day/Time of Incident: June 23, 2018 at 3:55am



The Nanticoke City Police responded to the report of an armed Robbery that occurred at 3:55am at the Turkey Hill Minit Mart, 460 West Main St Nanticoke City.

A male suspect entered the store at 3:55 am, jumped over the counter and demanded the money from the cash register while holding a large kitchen type knife. Afterward, the male is observed running away on nearby Alden Rd.

The male suspect is described as wearing winter gloves, a blue scarf over his face, black blue jeans, and black boots. The knife is described as having a brown handle.

Police are also seeking to speak with a white female who was within the store at the time of the robbery. Photographs of this witness are attached.

Additional information will be provided when it becomes available.

Anyone with information about this crime and the identity of the female is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police at 570-735-2200 ext.

6/19/2018

Hanover Twp. police capture assault suspect

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

HANOVER TWP. — A man wanted on aggravated assault charges since September was captured following a traffic stop early Tuesday, according to police.

Township police say they contacted Patrick Shanahan, 26, of Wilkes-Barre, during a traffic stop on South Main Street in the Lee Park section around 2:40 a.m. Tuesday. After learning Shanahan was wanted by Nanticoke police on assault charges, he was transferred to their custody for processing, police said.

According to the charges, Nanticoke police responded to 336 E. Washington St. around 3:30 p.m. Sept. 21 to a report of a woman who had been badly beaten.

The victim, Brandi Balasavage, told police that Shanahan, her cousin, had come into her bedroom and gotten into an argument because he thought she had been texting his boyfriend, according to police.

The argument grew heated and they went to a hallway, where Shanahan began arguing with Balasavage about a small purse, the complaint says. Balasavage reported that Shanahan then got on top of her and punched her in the face repeatedly before fleeing the scene, police said. Balasavage suffered a three-inch cut on the left side of her face as well as several small cuts and bruises on the right side, police said. She was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for treatment and evaluation.

Police charged Shanahan with aggravated assault, simple assault, reckless endangerment, disorderly conduct and harassment. Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. arraigned him on Tuesday morning and set a preliminary hearing for June 27.

5/31/2018

Loose tot prompts endangerment charges

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A mother and grandmother are facing charges for several instances of neglecting a child, including one time when the toddler wandered into traffic and was nearly stuck by a car, police alleged Wednesday.

Tatiana Iesha Moore, 20, and her mother, Trisella Denise Hubbard, 41, both of 200 W. Main St., are each charged with endangering the welfare of a child.

Both were arraigned Wednesday by Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker, who ordered them jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$75,000 bail.

According to arrest papers:

The first instance of suspected neglect authorities were alerted to occurred April 17 when a passerby spotted the 2-year-old boy in a diaper sitting on a curb along busy West Main Street near the intersection with Slope Street.

As the man waited for police to arrive, Moore identified herself as the boy's mother. Moore later told police she was unaware the boy left the home, police said.

Nanticoke police said they contacted Luzerne County Children and Youth Services, which made an arrangement with Hubbard to be responsible for the supervision of the child.

Around 10:45 a.m. May 16, police said another passerby spotted the boy, wearing only a diaper, wandering in the middle of Slope Street in the middle of a rain storm. The woman said she almost hit the boy with her car.

The woman took control of the boy to make sure he was safe and made attempts to locate people in the area who might be the boy's guardians, police said. After not being able to find anyone, the woman brought the boy to the Nanticoke police station.

Nanticoke police took the boy to the home of Moore and Hubbard and eventually got someone to answer after multiple attempts, police said.

Neither realized the boy was missing, police said.

Officials with children and youth were again contacted.

By 2:45 p.m. that same day, police were again called to the home for the report of the boy hanging out of a second-story window.

By that time, children and youth caseworkers were on scene and witnessed the incident that alarmed callers. The child was taken into custody via a court order that child welfare officials obtained, police said.

Hubbard said she was washing dishes and Moore was taking a bath while the boy was hanging out the window, police said.

The women are slated for a preliminary hearing on June 13 at 10 a.m.

5/31/2018

Mother, grandmother charged with endangering toddler

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City police on Wednesday charged a Nanticoke mother and grandmother with endangering a toddler who was left unsupervised and found wandering the streets and hanging out a window, according to court papers.

Police allege Tatiana Iesha Denise Moore, 20, and her mother, Trisella Denise Hubbard, 42, of West Main Street, failed to supervise Moore's 2-year-old boy, who was found wearing only a diaper in the streets April 17 and May 16.

Police further allege the toddler was hanging out a second-floor window of their residence May 16.

It is the second time Moore has been charged with endangering a child.

Court records say Moore was sentenced in November by Luzerne County Judge Michael Vough to 12 months in the Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition program, a special probationary sentence for first-time, non-violent offenders. That case included charges of

endangering the welfare of children, disorderly conduct, driving without a license and failure to secure a child in a safety seat. It stemmed from a traffic stop by Plymouth police in October 2016, where an officer spotted an approximate 1-year-old in Moore's vehicle not secured in a safety seat. Moore shoved the 1-year-old several times as the toddler struck his head against the passenger-side door, court records say.

According to the criminal complaint filed Wednesday:

Moore's 2-year-old was wearing only a diaper when he was found by a passerby near the curb in the area of West Main and Slope streets April 17. The passerby secured the child and called police.

While officers responded, Moore emerged from her house and retrieved her child.

The incident prompted an investigation by Luzerne County Children & Youth, which established a safety plan for the child. The plan called for Hubbard to be the responsible person to supervise the toddler.

Less than a month later on May 16, police responded to two incidents involving the toddler.

A passerby traveling on Slope Street spotted the boy, wearing only a diaper, standing in the middle of the road. The driver had to swerve to avoid striking the child. The passerby secured the child and drove to city police headquarters when she was not able to find the child's guardians or parents in the area.

Police located Moore and Hubbard at their residence and both did not realize the toddler was missing from the house.

Later the same day at 2:45 p.m., police returned to the house on a report a toddler was hanging out a second-floor window.

Child caseworkers were at the house and stood beneath the window where the toddler was spotted.

Hubbard claimed to be washing dishes on the first floor, and Moore was reportedly in a bathroom.

Moore and Hubbard were arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on one count of endangering the welfare of children. They were jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$75,000 bail each.

5/24/2018

Police: Handcuffed man attempts escape

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A man detained in handcuffs during a traffic stop ran away from a city police officer and jolted in front of moving vehicles in an escape attempt on Tuesday, court records say.

Police said they stopped the driver of a Pontiac Vibe for an expired inspection sticker on Kosciusko Street at about 5:30 p.m.

The driver identified himself as Scott Davis at which police were unable to verify. Police allege the Pontiac was registered to a deceased person and the driver was unable to provide a reason to why he was driving the vehicle.

As the driver was handcuffed, he broke free from custody and ran into heavy traffic on Kosciusko Street, police said.

Police chased the driver to East Main Street that also had heavy traffic. An officer deployed his Taser as the driver ran into traffic, police said.

Police identified the driver as Jeffrey Junior Ray, 23, of South Grant Street, Wilkes-Barre.

A records check revealed Ray had an active warrant for his arrest by Wilkes-Barre Township police alleging he stole a backpack from a vehicle in the parking lot of Wegmans on Aug. 20, court records say.

Ray allegedly told city police he attempted to escape because he was wanted.

Ray was arraigned Wednesday by District Judge Ferris Webby in Luzerne County Central Court on charges of escape, resisting arrest, false identification to law enforcement and three vehicle citations. He was also charged by township police with two counts of theft.

Ray was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$15,000 total bail.

5/16/2018

Nanticoke police apprehend alleged parole fugitive

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Too exhausted from running, Michael Anthony Epps surrendered to city police after a long foot chase, they say.

Police said Epps, 19, of Main Road, Hanover Township, gave up while trying to hide in shrubs in the area of 1 W. Broad St. just after 11 p.m. Monday.

Epps was wanted by the state Department of Probation and Parole on a violation.

According to a criminal complaint:

Police spotted Epps, who they knew was wanted, in the area of South Market and East Main streets.

Epps took off running on South Market, through alleys and across Patriot Park Square and back again on South Market. Police last saw Epps running through the parking lot of FNCB Bank.

While searching the area, Epps was found hiding in shrubs.

The teen told officers he was physically exhausted from running.

Epps also admitted he ran from police because he was wanted and did not want to return to jail. Epps claimed he was aware he was wanted because he received mail last week from the parole department.

Epps was arraigned Tuesday by District Judge Joseph Spagnuolo Jr. in Luzerne County Central Court on a charge of flight to avoid apprehension. He was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$15,000 bail and on the parole violation.

5/11/2018

Prosecutors will seek death penalty in killing of 97-year-old Nanticoke woman

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Police charged Anthony Joseph Spudis, 35, with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of Gertrude Price, whose family found

her brutally beaten body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013.

Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty against the former Nanticoke man accused of brutally beating and stabbing a 97-year-old woman with a screwdriver as she slept in her bed on Thanksgiving in 2013.

Members of the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office announced the decision Friday morning at the formal arraignment for Anthony Spudis.

Spudis, 35, is charged with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price, whose family found her brutally beaten body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013.

Prosecutors said aggravated circumstances exist allowing them to seek the death penalty, including that the the homicide occurred during a felony.

Prosecutors allege Spudis — who was living with his girlfriend at 2 W. Union St., 820 feet away from Price's home — went out to burglarize homes Thanksgiving night in 2013. He broke a basement window frame and screen to enter Price's home, thinking no one was there, according to the charges. When he encountered Price, Spudis stabbed her with a screwdriver and beat her to death, then continued robbing the home, prosecutors said.

Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley set a trial date for Nov. 27.

5/9/2018

WB man charged with forcing sex on teen girl

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A Wilkes-Barre man was charged Tuesday for allegedly having sex with a teen girl in the city more than a dozen times.

Nanticoke police investigated claims by the 14-year-old, who alleged she was forced by Jeremiah Corey Calk, 31, to have sex inside a home on New Grant Street from October through the middle of January.

When police questioned Calk on Saturday, he admitted to having sexual encounters with the teen that began with oral sex and progressed to other activities.

Court documents allege sexual contact took place over three months, from Oct. 1 to Jan. 10. Those same documents allege Calk estimated he had sexual encounters with the girl approximately 17 times in three weeks.

Calk was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on felony charges of statutory sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, corruption of minors and unlawful contact with a minor. Calk was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

According to a criminal complaint:

The girl's mother reported the suspected sex assaults March 12, telling officers she allowed Calk to stay in the basement of the home.

The girl was later questioned by a forensic interviewer at the Luzerne County Children's Advocacy Center.

She told the interviewer Calk was a good person and suffered from post traumatic stress disorder. The girl claimed Calk initially did not pressure her as she did not trust men.

Over time, the girl said Calk began to do things to her as her mother slept or went to church. She claimed her mind went "blank," and she was not able to say "yes" or "no." She said Calk would assault her "every single night."

The girl's mother estimated she allowed Calk to stay at her house from September to February.

This is not the suspect's first brush with the law.

Court records say Calk was sentenced by a county judge in June 2015 to 48 days to 15 months in prison after he pleaded guilty to receiving stolen property for his role in stealing a woman's purse outside the Quick Stop store on Spring Street, Wilkes-Barre, in July 2011.

Brother John Calk, 33, pleaded guilty to stealing the purse and was sentenced to 16 to 32 months in prison, records show.

5/8/2018

Nanticoke man charged with assaulting woman

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A city man was arraigned Tuesday on two arrest warrants alleging he assaulted his on-and-off again girlfriend in front of a young girl.

Police allege Timothy Michael Comoroski, 32, forced his way inside a West Noble Street residence on Nov. 19 and assaulted Jolene Bullock.

Comoroski is also accused of assaulting Bullock on Jan. 2.

According to the criminal complaints:

Bullock allegedly told police she and Zachary Hallas were helping her daughter with homework on Nov. 19 when Comoroski forced his way inside the residence and began yelling. She claimed Comoroski assaulted her when Hallas left the room.

When Bullock attempted to call police, she claimed Comoroski ripped the phone from her hand and left the house. She told police Comoroski had not lived at her residence for a month prior to the alleged incident.

The girl remained in the kitchen while Comoroski allegedly assaulted Bullock.

An arrest warrant was issued for Comoroski on Nov. 21 charging him with burglary, robbery, theft, simple assault and harassment.

Several weeks later on Jan. 2, Comoroski returned to Bullock's residence and allegedly assaulted her in front of the girl.

Police said they were met at the door by the girl who stated, "He hit my mommy, she's bleeding from her nose," the complaint says.

Comoroski ran out the back door when police were at the front door.

An officer went to the rear of the house where Comoroski ran away and eluded capture.

Bullock allegedly told police Comoroski struck her during an argument and he wouldn't let her and her daughter call 911.

An arrest warrant was issued Jan. 5 charging Comoroski with simple assault and harassment.

Comoroski was arraigned by District Judge David Barilla in Luzerne County Central Court on the charges listed in the arrest warrants. He

was jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$10,000 total bail.

5/5/2018

Police: Robbers warned clerk they would return for heist

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A city man wanted on sex assault charges was captured Friday after he and others informed a convenience store clerk they would be back in an hour to rob the place, according to police.

Police on Tuesday charged Dylan Charles Monelli, 22, of 17 S. Hanover St., with having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old girl, but he wasn't captured until early Friday after he and two accomplices announced their plan to hold up the Turkey Hill Minit Market at 460 W.

Main St., according to police.

According to a police affidavit, a clerk at the store contacted police around 12:20 a.m. Friday to report three people had just come to the store and revealed they would be back in an hour to rob it. The trio instructed the clerk to go by the grills when they came back so that one of them could take cigarettes and other items from behind the counter without any trouble, police said.

The clerk told police she went along with the conversation because she was in fear for her life.

Police staked out the store from a nearby parking lot, and around 1 a.m. a car with three people matching the suspect descriptions pulled up to the store, the complaint says. One of the people entered the store and the driver, later identified as Monelli, honked the horn to alert his friend when police pulled behind the car, according to the charges.

Police confronted the person in the store, a 17-year-old boy who had unopened packs of cigarettes and cupcakes in his pockets, police said.

Asked how he planned to pay for the items, he said he didn't, according to police.

Monelli claimed he had no idea why the police were asking him questions, then explained the minor made comments about robbing the store but that he didn't think he really planned to do it, the affidavit says. Monelli claimed he just wanted some Little Debbie cakes because they were only two for \$1, police said.

Police identified the third member of the trio as Elizabeth Moore, 18, of Nanticoke, who had been reported as missing. She initially said she had no part in the plan, but later admitted to hearing the minor and Monelli talking about it, police said.

Police charged all three with robbery and conspiracy to commit robbery. Monelli was also arrested on the warrant charging him with statutory sexual assault and corruption of minors.

In that case, police say Monelli admitted having a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old girl during the last half of 2017, while he was 21 years old. Most of the encounters took place at the girl's home, but Monelli also brought her to a cemetery in Newport Twp. to have sex, according to police.

Police say the juvenile was released to his mother, while Monelli and Moore were arraigned before Magisterial District Judge David A. Barilla. The judge set bail at \$12,000 for Monelli, and \$1,000 for Moore. They were booked into the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for later this month.

5/5/2018

Cops: Trio told clerk they'd come back to rob store, got busted trying

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Three people who kept their word to return and rob a convenience store were caught in the act, police said.

Dylan Monelli and Elizabeth Moore, both of Nanticoke, and a 17-year-old boy were taken into custody outside the Turkey Hill on West Main Street shortly after 1 a.m. Friday. They now face charges of robbery and conspiracy.

Monelli, 22, was also wanted on charges of statutory sexual assault for allegedly engaging in sex acts with a 15-year-old girl. He was arraigned and committed to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$10,000 bail on the sex charges and \$2,000 on the robbery charges. Moore, 19, was released on \$1,000 unsecured bail. The juvenile was released to the custody of his mother.

Police said they were tipped off by a clerk at the store when they stopped in while on routine patrol around 12:20 a.m., minutes after the trio's initial visit.

According to a criminal complaint:

Two males and a female came into the store and told the clerk they would be back in an hour to steal cigarettes and other items. They told the clerk that she needed to go to the back by the grill when they returned so nothing could go wrong and the younger male could grab cigarettes from behind the counter and other items. The older male said he lived nearby and they would return.

The clerk told police she went along with the conversation, saying "Yeah, sure" to the trio because she has children and feared for her life. She said she did not know if they would harm her and was uncertain if they had weapons.

Police waited next to the store parking lot and spotted a maroon vehicle pull into the lot around 1 a.m. A skinny male got out of the vehicle, later identified as a Jeep, and went into the store. Police drove their marked vehicle behind the Jeep and saw a man and woman in the front seat. The driver of the Jeep hit the horn to alert the teen inside that police were on scene.

An officer stayed with the Jeep and another officer went inside the store to ask the teen for identification. The officer noticed packs of unopened cigarettes in the pockets of the suspect's pants and hooded shirt, plus two unopened packages of cupcakes. When asked how he was going to pay for the items, the teen said he wasn't and was taken into custody and put in a patrol car.

Monelli said he didn't think the boy would follow through on his comment about robbing the store. Monelli said he drove the juvenile to the store to buy Little Debbie cakes that were two for \$1. Monelli later confessed he and the juvenile talked about the robbery.

Moore, who police said was the subject of a missing person report, initially said she heard the boy talk about the robbery and didn't think he would do it. She recanted, saying she heard Monelli and the juvenile talk about the robbery, but it was mainly the boy's doing.

The clerk identified them as the people who came into the store.

4/26/2018

Ice cream business robbed in Nanticoke

Times Leader

City police are investigating an armed robbery at Chi Chi's Ice Cream on West Broad Street on Wednesday.

A witness told police a white male, wearing a gray-hooded sweatshirt and a black bandana covering a portion of his face, entered the business at about 8:44 p.m. and threatened a cashier with a meat cleaver-type knife while demanding money.

Police described the suspect as being 5 feet 7 inches to 5 feet 10 inches tall.

Anyone with information about the armed robbery is asked to call **Nanticoke police at 570-735-2200.**

4/20/2018

Prosecutors reduce arson charge against manslaughter parolee

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Prosecutors on Friday downgraded an arson charge against a Newport Township man who was accused of setting a brush fire while free on parole on an involuntary manslaughter conviction.

Corey Eckrote, 53, of 1048 Rear E. Main St., had been facing felony counts of arson and risking catastrophe, as well as a misdemeanor count of possessing drug paraphernalia, after police alleged he set a fire that broke out in the area of 100 Brown Row on March 26.

In court Friday, Assistant District Attorney Thomas Hogans said prosecutors had agreed to reduce the arson charge to a misdemeanor count of criminal mischief and would drop the remaining counts in exchange for Eckrote waiving a preliminary hearing.

At the request of the defense, Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. reduced Eckrote's bail from \$100,000 to \$10,000 unsecured and set a dispositional hearing for June 7.

Prosecutors say Eckrote was found in the area of the fire that broke out March 26 and that he repeatedly apologized for setting the fire, saying he "did something stupid." He was also found in possession of a green cut straw with a powdery substance in his back pocket, which he claimed was residue from his prescription Percocet, according to the charges.

At the time, Eckrote was on parole from his two- to six-year prison sentence imposed after a jury convicted him of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment over the death of his 2.5-month-old Jaxon, who suffocated on Feb. 14, 2014.

The boy's mother, 44-year-old Tracey Ann Gonda, fell asleep with him in her arms and he got wedged in the cushion of a recliner, according to prosecutors.

During Eckrote's trial, prosecutors placed the blame for the child's death on him because he knew Gonda was an addict yet nevertheless bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor and left her with Jaxon while he went out for drinks at the Four Hundred Club of Nanticoke.

Gonda pleaded guilty in September 2015 to endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors, and was sentenced to 15 to 60 months in prison.

4/20/2018

Trial date set for teen accused of having ax, knives outside Nanticoke High

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A trial date has been set for the student police say had axes and knives inside his vehicle at Greater Nanticoke Area High School in February. Dylan Jeffrey White, 18, of Nanticoke, appeared before Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough, who confirmed a trial date of June 11.

White is facing a single misdemeanor count of possession of a weapon on school property.

The teen was arrested Feb. 22 after school officer Ray Whittaker noticed an ax with a 35-inch handle on the passenger-side floor of a Mazda Protege.

The car was parked near the school's gym. It was determined the parking space was registered to White.

City police were called to the school. Police searched the vehicle and say they found, in addition to the ax, an 11-inch knife in the glove box, a fully extended 9-inch knife in the console and a 13-inch hatchet under the driver's seat.

White was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke. He was initially jailed in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

Since then, his bail has been reduced to \$50,000, but court records do not indicate if he has posted the lower amount.

4/19/2018

Cops: Nanticoke woman stunned by Taser after challenging officer to fight

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A woman allegedly challenged an officer to fight her before she was stunned by a Taser outside a gas station Tuesday night.

Police arrested Remona Celee Harry, 34, of East Noble Street, Nanticoke, after investigating an altercation inside a vehicle parked outside Citgo on East Main Street just before 9 p.m.

According to a criminal complaint:

Police found Harry and another woman punching each other inside a vehicle that was also occupied by an 18-year-old and 10-year-old.

Harry refused to provide her name. She told an officer: "This is not New York."

Harry continued to refuse to give the officer her name and date of birth and her identification card. When told she was being detained for an alleged assault, Harry refused to get out of the vehicle.

An officer displayed his Taser and ordered Harry to exit the vehicle. Harry got out clenching her fists. She told an officer: "What do you

want, to fight?" When told again she was being detained, Harry responded: "Do you want to (expletive) fight?" Harry was stunned by a Taser during a struggle. She was placed in the rear seat of a cruiser and began screaming and kicking. She refused to allow the officer and paramedics to remove the Taser probes that penetrated her abdomen. Harry was transported to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, where the probes were removed. Harry was identified when her fingerprints were scanned at the Kingston Police Department. A family member took custody of the children in the vehicle. Harry was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke on charges of resisting arrest, disorderly conduct and harassment. She was jailed for lack of \$50,000 bail.

4/18/2018

Nanticoke man requests hearing on sex assault charges

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A man from Nanticoke accused of forcing a woman to perform a sex act requested a hearing after a negotiated plea deal was unable to be reached with the Luzerne County district attorney's office on Wednesday. Nanticoke police earlier this month arrested William E. Plunkett II, 38, after a woman claimed he forced her to perform a lewd act inside his residence on Phillips Street on
A woman told police she awoke at 5 a.m. for work and Plunkett began arguing with her. She claimed Plunkett searched her cell phone and did not like what he saw. Plunkett became enraged, struck the woman in the face and grabbed her by the neck forcing her onto her knees to perform a lewd act, the complaint says. Plunkett later returned the cell phone to the woman and allowed her to leave. Police alleged Plunkett resisted arrest, resulting in an officer sustaining an arm injury. Police also learned Plunkett was wanted by the Lackawanna County Sheriff's Department. Court records say a warrant was issued for Plunkett by Lackawanna County Court on March 8 charging him with violating probation on a 2017 guilty plea for a drug paraphernalia possession charge. Police charged Plunkett with involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, sexual assault, indecent assault, resisting arrest, simple assault and harassment. He remains jailed at the county correctional facility for lack of \$35,000 bail. Plunkett appeared for his preliminary hearing in Central Court and met privately with his court appointed attorney, Brian C. Corcoran. After the private meeting, Plunkett opted for a hearing, which rescheduled the proceeding to May 4.

4/14/2018

Edwardsville man accused of robbing Nanticoke pharmacy

Police say they have identified Ryan Stanley Romanoskey, 25, as the man who robbed the Rite Aid Pharmacy in Nanticoke in November.

A man wanted on attempted robbery and assault charges alleging he tried to hold up a drug store and pistol-whipped a man who intervened was arraigned Thursday. Ryan Stanley Romanoskey, 25, last known to reside in Edwardsville, was arraigned Thursday morning and jailed as he awaits trial on charges alleging he tried to rob the Rite Aid Pharmacy at 5 E. Main St. the evening of Nov. 3. According to the charges, Romanoskey entered the store and went to the counter pretending to buy candy. When the clerk, Cristen O'Brien, went to complete the transaction, Romanoskey put a black object to her chest and said, "Give me all the money and two cartons of cigarettes," the complaint says. Romanoskey jumped onto the counter, but O'Brien pushed him off and yelled for help, prompting customers to come to her aid, police said. Romanoskey then ran out of the store past witness Stephen Kocher Jr., who called for Romanoskey to stop, according to the complaint. Kocher gave chase but Romanoskey swung a black handgun and hit him in the face, causing a cut to Kocher's left eyebrow, according to police. Police put out a press release and a surveillance photo of the robber, and a family who knows Romanoskey recognized him on the news, police said. According to the complaint, Lori Beth Thomas told investigators that a few hours before the robbery, Romanoskey had come to her house and was under the influence of something. Romanoskey had a crack pipe that he showed to Thomas' children and was trying to call someone to buy crack, police said. After about a half hour, Romanoskey left and the family went to a football game, the complaint says. When they returned, the children saw a report about the robbery on the news and recognized the robber as Romanoskey, according to police. When they told her, Thomas recognized Romanoskey as well, police said. Police charged Romanoskey on Nov. 14 with two counts each of attempted robbery, simple assault and harassment. Court records show he was also wanted on a felony escape charge out of Wilkes-Barre that was filed last October. Magisterial District Judge Alexandra Kokura Kravitz arraigned him on the escape charge Wednesday evening and set bail at \$25,000 in that case. Magisterial District Judge Joseph D. Spagnuolo Jr. arraigned him in the attempted robbery case on Thursday morning and set bail at \$50,000 on those charges. Romanoskey was booked into the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for later this month.

4/7/2018

Suspect in brutal 97-year-old woman's murder ordered to stand trial



James Halpin - Citizens Voice

The former Nanticoke man accused of brutally beating and stabbing a 97-year-old woman with a screwdriver as she slept in her bed on Thanksgiving will stand trial on murder charges, but the extent of his ex-girlfriend's involvement in the case remained a mystery following a preliminary hearing Friday.

Anthony Joseph Spudis, 35, is charged with criminal homicide, burglary and robbery in the death of 97-year-old Gertrude Price, whose family found her brutally beaten body in her bed at 23 E. Grand St. in Nanticoke on Nov. 29, 2013.

Prosecutors allege Spudis — who was living with his then-girlfriend at 2 W. Union St., mere blocks away from Price's home — went out to burglarize homes Thanksgiving night in 2013. He broke a basement window frame and screen to enter Price's home, thinking no one was there, according to the charges.

When he encountered Price, Spudis stabbed her with a screwdriver and beat her to death, then continued robbing the home, prosecutors said. Taryn Simms, 33, initially told police Spudis brought her back to Price's home, where she saw Price lying in her bed, not breathing. But in court Friday, Simms had a different story.

With an attorney seated at her side to provide counsel, Simms testified that she had gone to work Thanksgiving night 2013 providing home care to a patient in Kingston. Spudis was supposed to be watching her 7-month-old baby, but when she got home around 10:45 p.m. only the baby was there, she said.

Spudis later returned, claiming to have gone on a walk, she said.

Simms denied knowing Price or ever being inside her house. When Assistant District Attorney Dan Zola asked if she told police in her original statement she had gone upstairs and seen Price's body, she paused the hearing to consult attorney Nanda Palissery.

"I'm not going to answer that question," Simms said when she turned back to the microphone.

During cross-examination by defense attorney John Pike, Simms said she was aware that her DNA alone had been found on a kitchen knife found outside the screen window that had been pried open leading into Price's basement. Simms also admitted that only her DNA had been found on the screen and on a screwdriver that police found on Price's kitchen table — a screwdriver Price's family members said did not belong to her.

And Simms also admitted that her DNA alone had been found on a white shelled necklace that police found on the floor next to the bed where Price died.

Court records show no charges have been filed against Simms related to the case.

Family members found Price's body in her bed the next day. Her son-in-law, Richard Belmont, said when he went into the house he saw it had been ransacked, with drawers left open and Price's belongings strewn across the floors.

After walking up the glass-covered stairs, Belmont saw a lump in Price's bed and pulled back the bedsheets to find her lifeless body, he said. "There's blood all over her face and I'm screaming Gert! Gert! Gert!" Belmont said.

Crime scene photographs displayed at the hearing showed Price laying on her back in the bed, with a white sheet pulled down over her shoulders. Her face was bloodied and blood spatter dotted her blue pillowcase.

Luzerne County Coroner Bill Lisman said Price had been stabbed in the left ear three times with a "screwdriver-like" instrument, with a fourth stab wound behind the ear. She had also been beaten on the face, and had a broken nose and jaw, he said.

To bolster their case against Spudis, prosecutors brought forward a series of jailhouse informants. Former inmate Michael Owens, 41, and current prisoner Jared Hospodar, 23, both maintained that while Spudis was serving time in the Luzerne County Correctional Facility on unrelated charges in 2014, he expressed concerns about being charged related to Price's murder.

"He was like, 'I killed her,'" Owens said.

But a third potential informant backfired when called to the stand.

Prosecutors say William Gronosky — a 35-year-old prisoner serving 33 to 66 years in state prison for a robbery spree that included firing shots at two police officers — previously told investigators that Spudis talked to him about the slaying. But wearing an orange Department of Corrections jumpsuit in court Friday, Gronosky denied even knowing Spudis.

"You guys made up a story and asked me to come in here and say it," Gronosky said. "I don't even know this dude right here. I've never seen him in my life."

Assistant District Attorney Michelle Hardik had Gronosky declared a hostile witness, but he refused to budge as she went through the statement troopers allege he gave them about a conversation with Spudis. When it was over, Gronosky shook his head.

"You wanna talk about hostile?" Gronosky said. "Wow."

But the prosecution case didn't hinge on informants alone. Last summer, with Simms' permission, police searched the basement of the home at 2 W. Union St., finding numerous items belonging to Price including bills, mail, family photos and a white jewelry armoire, according to prosecutors.

State police Cpl. Edward Urban also testified that Spudis' DNA was found on a pair of Timberland boots that matched shoe impressions collected in Price's basement. Spudis' DNA was also on rubber gloves recovered from the crime scene, he said.

Following the testimony, Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker forwarded all charges to county court for trial.

Spudis has been held without bail at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility since his arrest in December.

3/29/2018

Man on parole for involuntary manslaughter charged with arson

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A township man on parole after being convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the death of his infant son was charged this week with arson

for allegedly setting a brush fire.

Corey Eckrote, 53, of 1048 Rear E. Main St., is accused of setting a fire that broke out in the area of 100 Brown Row on Monday afternoon. Police say they responded to the area and found firefighters working to contain the fire to a hillside, as well as a man later identified as Eckrote walking around the blaze. When police confronted Eckrote, he admitted starting the fire to “clean it up,” according to a police affidavit.

Eckrote repeatedly apologized for setting the fire, saying he “did something stupid” and he was sorry, according to police. Police say Eckrote also asked to be released, explaining that his father recently died and that his mother suffers from Alzheimer’s disease and needs him around. Police handcuffed and searched Eckrote, finding a green cut straw with a powdery substance in his back pocket, according to the complaint. Eckrote claimed the powder was his prescription Percocet, according to the charges.

Police charged Eckrote with felony counts of arson and risking catastrophe, as well as a misdemeanor count of possessing drug paraphernalia. Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned him and ordered Eckrote jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$100,000. A preliminary hearing was set for April 4.

In 2015, Eckrote was sentenced to serve two to six years in state prison after a jury convicted him of involuntary manslaughter and child endangerment over the death of his 2½-month-old Jaxon, who suffocated Feb. 14, 2014.

The boy’s mother, 44-year-old Tracey Ann Gonda, fell asleep with him in her arms and he got wedged in the cushion of a recliner, according to prosecutors.

During Eckrote’s trial, prosecutors placed the blame for the child’s death with him because he knew Gonda was an addict yet nevertheless bought Gonda two 24-ounce containers of malt liquor and left her with Jaxon while he went out for drinks at the Four Hundred Club of Nanticoke.

When he returned, Gonda — who was under court order not to be alone with the child — sought his help, but Eckrote gave the baby back, saying he had to be up for work in the morning, according to prosecutors.

After finding the infant the next day, Gonda initially claimed she had placed the child safely into his bassinet, but admitted she lied when her other son told police his brother had been lying with his head in the cushions.

Gonda pleaded guilty in September 2015 to endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of minors, and was sentenced to 15 to 60 months in prison. Records show she has also been released but has absconded on her parole.

Department of Corrections Susan McNaughton said Eckrote was paroled from his sentence on Nov. 4, 2017, after serving his minimum sentence. His maximum term expires on Nov. 4, 2021, she said.

3/28/2018

Nanticoke man arrested after allegedly threatening to kill family

Times Leader

A city man threw himself on the floor of a holding cell, then began to cry and apologize for terrorizing his family during a domestic disturbance late Tuesday, according to arrest papers.

Nanticoke officers arrested David Alan Rausch, 24, after a foot chase that began at his house in the 300 block of West Main Street and ended in the 200 block of East Green Street at about 11:15 p.m.

Police allege Rausch assaulted Ruben Lopez and threatened to leave and return with a gun to kill everyone in his house.

Three children all under age 8 were at the residence at the time, police said.

Rausch was arraigned Wednesday in Luzerne County Central Court on five counts each of simple assault, terroristic threats, and one count each of resisting arrest, harassment and public drunkenness. He was jailed for lack of \$25,000 bail.

Police noted Rausch is on state parole.

3/26/2018

Firecracker blamed in reported Nanticoke explosion

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A reported explosion at a city building on Sunday turned out to be a minor incident that might have involved fireworks, according to Nanticoke Fire Chief Kevin Hazleton.

Emergency officials received numerous calls about a loud noise that sounded like an explosion in the area of South Prospect and East Broad streets late Sunday afternoon, Hazleton said.

Investigators found one window of a building on the block had been broken, the chief said. It appears the damage was caused by the blast that people had reported hearing, Hazleton said. The noise might have come from someone setting off a large firecracker such as an M-80, he said.

3/24/2018

Nanticoke man who pleaded guilty to child porn gets new sentence

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After a state appellate court ruled his original sentence was illegal, a Nanticoke man saw two years taken off his probation this week.

Micca Heppding, 37, was given the new sentence on Thursday by Luzerne County Judge Tina Polachek Gartley, after the appellate court called her original sentence “illegal.”

Heppding entered into a plea agreement with prosecutors, agreed to plead guilty to one count each of child pornography and corruption of minors, in exchange for other charges being withdrawn.

But after his sentencing in December 2016, his public defender, John Donovan, appealed, saying Polachek Gartley’s original sentence was

“excessive.”

Polachek Gartley originally sentenced Heppding to between three and six years in state prison on the child porn count, which would then be followed by a 21 to 42 month long stay in prison and 36 months of probation on the corruption count.

The Superior Court, though, said the sentence on the corruption count “exceeds the statutory maximum” of five years, or 60 months — combined with the prison stay and probation, Heppding was looking at between 57 and 78 months, breaking state law.

Polachek Gartley was ordered to give Heppding a new sentence, as the Superior Court upheld his guilty plea. That new sentence looks a lot like the original. His punishment for the child porn count remains unchanged, and he’s still getting 21 to 42 months in prison on the corruption count, which will still be served after the child porn sentence.

The only difference is that Heppding will now get one year of probation instead of three, bringing the sentence below the state maximum.

Polachek Gartley also gave Heppding 823 days credit for time already served, shaving more than two years off the new sentence.

He was remanded to the State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill.

3/10/2018

Nanticoke police charge Harrisburg man with drug, firearm possession

City police arrested a Harrisburg man when they allegedly found marijuana and a stolen handgun inside his vehicle Thursday.

Patrick L. Knight, 31, was arrested when officers investigated a suspicious male and a vehicle driving erratically in the area of West Field Street and Lincoln Avenue at about 2:20 p.m., a report states.

Police spotted Knight leaning into a Buick LeSabre that was parked partially on the road and a yard. Police detected a strong odor of marijuana coming from Knight and the vehicle.

Knight told police he was from Hazleton and was reliving his childhood but did not know he was in Nanticoke.

Police spotted marijuana residue and the barrel of a handgun sticking out of a nylon bag. The gun’s serial number was altered, but police were able to get the correct number from the gun’s manufacturing box inside the vehicle. The serial number showed the handgun was reported stolen in Harrisburg.

A plastic bag of marijuana and a digital scale were also found in the vehicle.

Knight was arraigned on charges of receiving stolen property, possessing a firearm with an altered serial number, firearms not to be carried without a license, possession of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and public drunkenness. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$30,000 bail.

3/6/2018

Nanticoke man charged with drug trafficking after search

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Police charged a Nanticoke man with drug trafficking on Monday after officers allegedly found drugs and paraphernalia during a search at his home.

Desmond Knott, 38, of 218 W. Ridge St., was arraigned Monday on felony counts of possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance, and misdemeanor counts of possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia.

According to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke and Hanover Twp. police:

The Luzerne County Drug Task Force served a search warrant at Knott’s home Monday morning. Knott was not there.

Officers found suspected marijuana, heroin/fentanyl, crack cocaine, two scales with powder residue and suspected drug paraphernalia.

Investigators found Knott at a West Pittston apartment. The resident, a woman, consented to a search of the apartment. In a safe, police found U.S. currency with serial numbers that matched those of “pre-recorded buy money” used in controlled drug purchases from Knott, the complaint states.

Knott told police that the woman who lives at the West Pittston apartment had nothing to do with the drugs found at his Nanticoke home. The woman told police that she would drive Knott around as he conducted drug deals and said she “was stupid for getting involved.”

A field test of the substances found at Knott’s home yielded positive results for marijuana, heroin/fentanyl and cocaine base, according to the complaint.

Following his arraignment, Knott was sent to Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$100,000 bail. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for March 14 before Magisterial District Judge Joseph Halsey.

2/22/2018

Nanticoke student had weapons on school property

elewis@timesleader.com

A student at Greater Nanticoke Area High School was charged Thursday with possessing axes and knives inside his vehicle on school property.

City police alleged school officer Ray Whittaker spotted an axe with a 35-inch handle on the passenger side floor of a Mazda Protege parked in the rear parking lot near the gymnasium just after 12 p.m.

The vehicle is registered with a school parking permit to Dylan Jeffrey White, 18, of West South Street, Nanticoke.

Whittaker notified school officials who spoke with White.

Police searched the vehicle allegedly finding an 11-inch knife in the glove box, a fully extended 9-inch knife in a console and a 13-inch hatchet under the driver’s side seat, according to the criminal complaint.

White was charged with a misdemeanor count of possession of a weapon on school property. He was arraigned by District Judge Donald Whittaker in Nanticoke and jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$100,000 bail.

Superintendent Dr. Ronald Grevera could not be immediately reached for comment Thursday afternoon.

2/22/2019

Woman sentenced for role in drug ring

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke woman will serve more than two years in federal prison for her role in a heroin trafficking ring, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Megan Fox, 31, was sentenced Tuesday to serve 30 months in prison for conspiring to distribute heroin in Luzerne County in early 2014, prosecutors said. According to prosecutors, Fox admitted to helping a drug ring distribute as much as 1 kilogram of heroin, the equivalent of up to 40,000 bags.

The ring leader, Desmond Mercer, previously pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

In addition to the prison time for Fox, Senior U.S. District Court Judge James M. Munley ordered her to forfeit nearly \$16,000 and a Buick vehicle that was seized in the investigation. She will also be required to serve three years probation upon her release.



2/20/2018

PRESS RELEASE

February 20, 2018

Incident: Retail Theft

Location: Rite Aid Pharmacy 5 East Main St. Nanticoke City

Date: February 19, 2018

Nanticoke City Police responded to the Rite Aid Pharmacy 5 East Main St. Nanticoke City for the report of a retail theft shortly after 11am.

A white male took possession of merchandise and ran out of the store when confronted by loss prevention personnel. A surveillance photo of the white male is attached. Anyone with information regarding his identity is asked to contact the Nanticoke City Police at 570-735-2200.

2/7/2018

Police: Pot-smoking parents charged after tot goes unresponsive

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Two city parents are facing child endangerment charges after their 18-month-old child became unresponsive in a house filled with marijuana smoke, according to police.

Raheem Twyman, 21, and Kayla Marie Bitzer, 25, both of 231 E. Green St., are accused of putting their three children in danger when they smoked marijuana in the house Tuesday afternoon.

According to a police affidavit, police and medics were dispatched to the family home at exactly 4:20 p.m. to a report of an unresponsive child. Police arrived and found medics treating the 18-month-old baby, who was taken to Wilkes-Barre General Hospital.

Bitzer, the mother, told police she and Twyman had been in the basement smoking marijuana while her three children — 18-month-old twins and a 3-year-old — remained on the first floor of the home, police said.

Twyman reported that the 3-year-old came to the basement door to say that the younger children were climbing on a table, so he went upstairs, according to the affidavit. One of the toddlers was on the table, limp and unresponsive, so Twyman yelled to Bitzer for help, police said.

Another resident of the home told police he had been asleep upstairs when Bitzer came up asking him to call 911, according to the affidavit. Police say the first floor and basement of the house smelled strongly of marijuana, and that Twyman turned over the remaining marijuana he had along with a marijuana grinder and blunt cigars.

The two children who were not hospitalized were taken into protective custody. Officials said the child who was treated was discharged from the hospital later Tuesday.

Police charged both parents with three felony counts of child endangerment and a misdemeanor count of possessing marijuana.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned them on Wednesday morning. The judge released Bitzer on \$75,000 unsecured bail but ordered Twyman jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$75,000.

Preliminary hearings were set for Feb. 14.

2/3/2018

Former Nanticoke mayor ruled incompetent in child luring case

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A former teacher and Nanticoke mayor who was accused of trying to lure children into his car with cash will not stand trial after a psychiatrist deemed him incompetent.

Edward J. Butkiewicz, 76, is facing misdemeanor charges of child luring and corruption of minors for allegedly trying to coax kids into his

car with promises of cash in exchange for doing “weird” things.

But Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough has signed an order staying the case indefinitely, writing that Dr. Richard E. Fischbein determined Butkiewicz is not competent to stand trial.

A source with knowledge of the case said Butkiewicz has vascular dementia.

The court order calls for Butkiewicz to be re-evaluated later this year to determine whether he will be able to regain competency to stand trial. Butkiewicz, of Mountain Top, is accused of roaming around and trying to coax children into his car along Rock Street in Glen Lyon last July. According to prosecutors, the first encounter involved a 13-year-old boy who said he was in the parking lot of an apartment complex when a silver car pulled up.

Butkiewicz asked the youth if there were any bars in the area, then asked if he could see the boy’s genitals, prosecutors said. The boy also described Butkiewicz saying he wanted to do “weird” things to him and offering money to get in the car, according to prosecutors.

A few days later, a 16-year-old boy reported that Butkiewicz had approached him twice. The first encounter was at Rock and East Main streets, where Butkiewicz asked if the boy was gay and wanted to make money, prosecutors said.

The second took place West Main and Market streets in Glen Lyon, where Butkiewicz asked the teen and another boy if they wanted to make money, prosecutors said.

Butkiewicz followed them into a Rock Street apartment complex, where they called 911. In addition to the luring and corruption charges, Butkiewicz is also facing charges of disorderly conduct and resisting arrest; police say he pushed back against the arresting officer.

He has been free since posting \$100,000 bail last August. Vough’s order says bail will continue pending the follow-up examination.

Butkiewicz, a retired elementary school teacher in the Greater Nanticoke Area School District, served terms as a Nanticoke City councilman and mayor prior to facing similar charges in 2003. In that case, a former student of Butkiewicz’s told police Butkiewicz had pulled up and offered a ride, fondling the boy as they drove through Nanticoke and Hanover Twp.

Butkiewicz pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of indecent assault in that case and was sentenced to two years of probation.

2/2/2018

Raid on Nanticoke drug house turns up dope, cash, kids

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

Three children were removed from a home and four adults were arrested after police raided a suspected drug house Thursday afternoon and found large quantities of heroin and marijuana.

Officers raided the home at 200 W. Main St. around 4 p.m. Thursday after a confidential informant bought heroin from two of its occupants on three occasions since November, according to police.

The Luzerne County Drug Task Force entered the home after officers knocked and heard what sounded like people running around inside.

Upon entering, police found the two targets of their investigation: Tarrell T. Humphrey, 33, and Daurron Jamison, 22.

A search of Humphrey turned up 60 bags of “PANTHER” brand heroin, the same type the confidential informant bought from both men during the lead up to the raid, police said.

In the upstairs master bedroom, which belongs to Walter Daymon Humphrey, 43, and Sadiqa Imanihamd Caines, 41, police found a large amount of marijuana, drug packaging materials, cash and a digital scale that was coated with white powder, according to police.

The cash was inside a purse in a closet where police also found three vacuum-sealed bags, each weighing about 120 grams, according to police. The contents of the vacuum bags tested positive for heroin, police said.

Police say Luzerne County Children and Youth Services caseworkers responded to the home and removed Caines’ three children, delivering them to a relative. Nanticoke City Code Enforcement was also apprised of the situation at the home, a rental property.

Police charged all four adults with drug trafficking, conspiracy to deliver drugs, drug possession and possession of drug paraphernalia. Tarrell Humphrey was also hit with counts of criminal use of a communication facility.

Magisterial District judge David A. Barilla arraigned the quartet on the charges Friday morning and set bail for each of them at \$75,000. They were being held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with preliminary hearings set for Feb. 21.

2/1/2018

Police: 300 kids involved in GNA-WVW brawl

Bob Kalinowski - Citizens Voice

A brawl involving up to 300 students erupted Tuesday night outside Wyoming Valley West High School after the school hosted a boys basketball game against Greater Nanticoke Area, police said.

Larksville police Sgt. Josh Evans, who was working security for the game, said the student sections for both schools were animated and they clashed after the heated contest, which Nanticoke won 69-62.

“It was a rivalry game. There was a large crowd on both sides. After the game, things got out of hand. There was a large disturbance,” Evans said.

While the school is in Plymouth, Larksville police provide security during games.

Evans said he and his partner radioed for backup from Plymouth and Edwardsville police when it appeared trouble was likely. He said the clashing sides were soon separated.

Punches were thrown, but there didn’t appear to be any serious injuries, he said.

Plymouth police would only confirm they are investigating a “large fight” involving juveniles that occurred on Wyoming Valley West school property.

The fight was reported around 8:38 p.m., police said.

Plymouth police said the brawl was investigated and juveniles that were interviewed were released to parents and guardians.

Investigators didn't say if charges would be filed.
Police say they are reviewing video of the fight.
Efforts to reach Valley West and Nanticoke school officials about the incident were not successful.

1/29/2018

Nanticoke man charged with repeated rape of child

Eric Mark - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man repeatedly raped a girl starting when she was 8 years old, city police allege.

Jason Buchanan, 36, was arraigned Sunday on a slew of felony charges, including rape of a child, statutory sexual assault, sexual assault, aggravated indecent assault of a child, indecent assault of a person less than 13 years of age, unlawful contact with a minor and corruption of a minor.

According to a criminal complaint filed by Nanticoke police, the victim, now 15, last month reported that Buchanan had sexually assaulted her since she was 8. The girl was interviewed at the Luzerne County Child Advocacy Center.

The girl said that Buchanan would come into her bedroom and perform sex acts. She said that when she asked Buchanan if he had to do this, he replied "Yes, we have to," the affidavit states. Buchanan also sexually assaulted the girl at least once outside the home, according to the affidavit.

Buchanan told the girl she is beautiful and warned her not to tell anyone because he "could get in so much trouble," the affidavit states.

The girl said she is afraid of Buchanan because he had been physically abusive toward her, according to the affidavit. She also said Buchanan

told her that if she ever needed anything sexual, she could go to him and he would "help her out," the affidavit states.

Buchanan's wife, Evalynn Buchanan, 35, was charged with a felony count of endangering the welfare of a child in connection with the case, according to court documents.

Both Buchanans are being held in Luzerne County Correctional Facility in lieu of \$500,000 bail, pending a preliminary hearing scheduled for Feb. 7 before Magisterial District Judge Donald Whittaker.

1/26/2018

Judge calls rapist 'predator,' imposes decades in prison

James Halpin- Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man convicted of raping a teenage girl, trying to molest her sister, and trying to force himself another woman was sentenced Friday to serve up to 50 years in state prison.

Glynn A. Wildoner, 38, of 223 W. Union St., offered a brief apology as he stood in court before Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough, who appeared unmoved by the gesture. The judge noted that Wildoner was out on bail on the charges stemming from the abuse of the sisters when he tried to sexually assault a female relative.

"To me you're a predator," Vough said. "You're a danger to this community. ... You need to be taken out of society for a very, very, long time."

Wildoner was first arrested in June 2016 on child rape charges alleging he forced himself on a 14-year-old girl and tried to have sex with the girl's sister. According to prosecutors, the girl's mother caught Wildoner when she unlocked her daughter's bedroom door and found the teen on the floor with her pants down and Wildoner on top of her.

The girl told police she had been trying to take a nap when Wildoner woke her by putting his hand over her mouth, saying "stay the (expletive) down," according to prosecutors. Wildoner then forced himself on the teen, warning that he would hurt her if she told anyone, prosecutors said.

The girl told prosecutors that Wildoner had raped her before, and her sister reported that several months earlier Wildoner tried to pressure her into having sex but she refused.

Police hit Wildoner with child rape and related charges, but he posted \$100,000 bail through a bondsman 11 days after his arrest. While out on bail, prosecutors say Wildoner went to a female relative's apartment and made sexual advances on her, putting his hands down her pants and offering her \$100 in exchange for sex.

Wildoner was again arrested, this time on charges of indecent assault.

In October, he went to trial on the rape case and a jury convicted him on multiple counts of rape, statutory sexual assault, unlawful contact with a minor and related offenses. Earlier this month, Wildoner then pleaded guilty to indecent assault and promoting prostitution in the second case.

During the sentencing hearing Friday, defense attorney John Donovan sought a sentence of 10-20 years in prison, arguing that Wildoner has a limited criminal history and that a longer sentence could amount to life in prison.

"By the time this sentence is complete, he will be in his late 50s," Donovan said. "It will let him lead some kind of a life."

But Assistant District Attorney Angela Sperrazza sought more time behind bars, describing Wildoner's conduct as "horrible" and noting that he victimized three people.

"This wasn't one slip up," Sperrazza said. "This wasn't one incident. This was a pattern of behavior that only stopped when (the girl's) mother walked in on it."

Vough sentenced Wildoner to 25 to 50 years in state prison, ordering him to have no contact with the victims and to register as a sex offender for life. The judge ordered Wildoner sent to the state Department of Corrections as soon as possible, giving him credit for 193 days time served.

1/26/2018

Patient death leads to felony charge for Nanticoke nurse

A registered nurse whose patient died under her care was charged Friday with a felony count of neglect of care alleging she failed to take adequate precautions after being warned her patient was in distress.

Kelly E. Levandowski, 39, of 35 rear W. South St., is accused of “intentionally, knowingly or negligently” failing to provide sufficient care to Melvin Johnson, 72, who died after going into cardiac arrest at Guardian Elder Care at 147 Old Newport St., on June 20, 2013.

According to a complaint filed by the state Attorney General’s Office, the criminal investigation began after the state Department of Health cited Guardian in 2013 for failing to provide adequate monitoring over the incident.

The complaint says that Johnson had suffered from a ruptured aneurism and subsequent bleeding of the brain prior to being admitted at Guardian on the day of her death. She had been on a ventilator, but was weened off of it prior to admission, according to the complaint.

The Guardian staff did not immediately put Johnson on 15-minute checks because there was no evidence that she had been pulling on a breathing tube upon admission, the complaint says. However staff on the 3-11 p.m. shift that day did observe Johnson pulling on the tube, and at least four members told Levandowski, a shift supervisor, that they were concerned about it, the complaint says.

Levandowski, however, stayed seated at the nursing station, according to the charges.

When Johnson pulled it out shortly after 7 p.m. that evening, Levandowski reinserted it herself and called Johnson’s doctor, but did not call 911 as required by facility policy, the complaint says. Levandowski also wrote in her notes that 15-minute checks were to continue, although prosecutors say there is no evidence that they had started previously.

“If 15-minute checks were in place at that time, they were proven to be ineffective, as Johnson was not adequately supervised in that she was able to remove her tube,” the complaint says.

About a half-hour after the first incident, another nurse discovered that Johnson had again removed the tube and was unresponsive, according to the complaint.

Levandowski’s notes indicate she tried unsuccessfully to reinsert the tube and performed CPR until medics arrived on scene. However, prosecutors noted in the complaint that no other staff members were able to corroborate Levandowski’s claim that she tried to save Johnson.

In fact, one nurse aide told investigators that after Johnson died, Levandowski directed her to fill out a form indicating 15-minute checks had been performed on Johnson since 3 p.m., even though they had not been. The aide reported that she complied because Levandowski was her boss and she felt intimidated, prosecutors said.

Another nursing aide also told investigators that someone had forged her initials on a check sheet for earlier in the afternoon, the complaint says.

During questioning, Levandowski told investigators that she should have called 911 and put Johnson under constant supervision after the first incident, but that “a lot was missed that night, obviously.”

The complaint alleges Levandowski engaged in criminal neglect of a patient for failing to take those steps, which are required under facility policy.

The complaint says Levandowski stopped working for Guardian in July 2015.

Magisterial District Judge Donald L. Whittaker arraigned Levandowski on Friday morning and released her on \$25,000 unsecured bail.

A preliminary hearing was set for Feb. 7.

1/25/2018

Camera recorded man using stolen credit card in Nanticoke

Times Leader



City police on Thursday released surveillance pictures of a man using a reported stolen credit card at the Turkey Hill store on West Main

Street last month.

Police said the credit card was stolen from a location on East Grand Street on Dec. 24, and used the same day at about 11:17 p.m. at the Turkey Hill store.

The man recorded in surveillance pictures operated a white Jeep Grand Cherokee.

1/20/2018

Nanticoke man acquitted on most charges in rape case

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man accused of rape was acquitted at trial of nearly all the charges against him Friday.

Christopher Bates, 44, faced charges including forcible rape, aggravated assault and false imprisonment alleging he forced himself on a woman at knife-point.

Prosecutors alleged Bates attacked the woman while she was sleeping around 2 a.m. Nov. 12, 2016, putting duct tape on her mouth and pulling a knife on her as he raped her.

But after about two hours of deliberations Friday, a jury found Bates not guilty on 18 of the 20 counts he faced. The jury convicted him on one misdemeanor count of simple assault, and Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough found Bates guilty on a summary harassment violation.

Bates was represented by Kingston attorney Nanda Palissery.

1/19/2018

Nanticoke man pleads guilty to string of robberies

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Nanticoke man accused in three robbery cases pleaded guilty Thursday.

Bobby Wicks, 40, pleaded guilty to charges of robbery, attempted robbery, conspiracy to commit robbery and simple assault. Luzerne County Judge Michael T. Vough accepted the plea and set sentencing for March 9.

Wicks was charged in three Nanticoke robberies: the robbery of the Cocoa Hut convenience store on Nov. 19, the attempted robbery of a Curry Donuts shop on Nov. 16, and an armed robbery of the Burger King on Nov. 13.

Wicks was remanded to the Luzerne County Correctional Facility pending sentencing.

1/19/2018

Laurel Run man pleads guilty to sex assault charges

James Halpin - Citizens Voice

A Laurel Run man accused of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl pleaded guilty Thursday to a felony count of statutory sexual assault. Christopher Cornell, 21, pleaded to a single count of the offense, with prosecutors dropping other charges. Luzerne County Judge Joseph F. Sklarosky Jr. accepted the plea and set sentencing for Feb. 26.

According to prosecutors, Cornell was 20 and the girl was 15 when they had sexual intercourse on multiple occasions last July at a home on East Noble Street in Nanticoke.

As part of his sentence, Cornell will be required to complete sex offender counseling.

1/16/2018

Police: Woman forced to perform oral sex in front of children

elewis@timesleader.com

A Monroe County man was arraigned Tuesday on charges he forced a woman to perform a oral sex in front of children inside an East Green Street residence.

Deon Hosmond Blair, 27, of Henryville, was arrested by Nanticoke police while investigating a domestic dispute at the residence just before 11 p.m. Monday.

A witness told police Blair was keeping a woman against her will inside the residence.

Police noticed the woman had facial and head injuries and pleaded with officers she needed help because Blair was hurting her, according to the criminal complaint.

Blair told officers to leave the residence.

When Blair was told that police were investigating a domestic dispute, Blair asked the witness to speak privately.

Police learned Blair was wanted by East Stroudsburg University police on assault and harassment charges stemming from an incident on Nov. 9. After he was handcuffed and taken away from the residence, the woman allegedly claimed he assaulted her.

She alleged Blair slapped and punched her and forced her to perform a lewd sex act on him in front of three children, ages 2, 1 and three months, the complaint says.

Police said the woman was transported to Commonwealth Wilkes-Barre General Hospital for treatment.

Blair was charged with two counts each with indecent assault and simple assault and a single count of harassment. He was jailed at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility for lack of \$20,000 bail and on the arrest warrant from East Stroudsburg University.