

Teacher Found Not Guilty in Sex Case

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A former Spring Valley high school biology teacher was found not guilty Monday in Bureau County Circuit Court of having had sex with a 15-year-old male student.

Gina M. Purvis, 29, of Fredricktown, Mo., formerly of Tiskilwa, was found not guilty of four counts of sexual assault by Circuit Judge H. Chris Ryan Jr.

"I'm thrilled the judge realized what was going on here," said one of Purvis' attorneys, Steven Glink of Northbrook.

Purvis had opted for a bench trial instead of a jury trial. The Ottawa-based Ryan heard the case because one Princeton-based judge, Marc P. Bernabei, recused himself and the other judge, A. Scott Madson, was removed on a motion by Purvis' attorneys.

Purvis did not testify during the week-long trial, but the now 17-year-old boy did.

Prosecutor Patrick J. Herrmann said the married Purvis, who is also a mother, had sex with the student more than once in early 2004. Purvis started a paid leave-of-absence in November, which was later changed to unpaid. Purvis was arrested in December and had been free on \$3,500 bond.

Herrmann could not be reached for comment.

Glink said the boy, who he noted has had trouble with the law, accused Purvis, because the boy was fearful he was in trouble for having spread false rumors about having had sex with Purvis; when confronted by officials about the rumors, Glink claimed the boy maintained the rumors were fact.

Glink said the boy made dubious assertions, such as that the boy had had sex nine times in two hours with Purvis, but the boy couldn't recall that Purvis had a large tattoo on her back.

Part of the prosecution's case was based on phone records showing numerous calls between the boy and Purvis. However, Glink said he was unimpressed:

"Yeah, that's weird, but it doesn't show she had sex with him."

Leo Johnson, who became superintendent at Hall High School in July, declined to comment on the case and said he did not know Purvis' status as a teacher at the school.

However, Glink said the school has dismissal proceedings pending against Purvis. The proceedings were put on hold while the criminal case was under way. Glink said if the school wants to pursue their proceedings, they would have to mount a case similar to the one mounted by prosecutors. If the school does not proceed, Purvis would be eligible for reinstatement and back pay. Glink added that Purvis is not now teaching and doubted her prospects of obtaining another teaching position, given what happened at Hall High School.

Besides Glink, Purvis was also defended by attorneys Nicholas Esposito of Chicago and James R. May of Princeton.