

Geneva County man sentenced to 30 years for rape conviction

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GENEVA — A Geneva County circuit court judge imposed a 30-year sentence Friday against a teenager convicted in June of the premeditated rape of a 6-year-old in 2003.

"I'm convinced your actions were deliberate," Judge Kenneth W. Quattlebaum said before he announced the sentence to 19-year-old Douglas John Howell.

"It is regrettable the abuses you've suffered," the judge said. "But at some point you have to be responsible."

During the trial, defense witnesses outlined the continuous sexual abuse Howell had endured at various state facilities from the time he was taken from his parents at age 3 until the arrest for rape at age 16.

The judge agreed Howell could serve at least two years of his sentence in the Alabama Clinical School in Birmingham, a facility for juvenile sex offenders. Howell was incarcerated there for almost two years following his arrest in April 2003.

David Harrison, Howell's attorney, said he does not plan to appeal the conviction and was pleased with the recommendation for continued therapy. He had asked each witness during the sentencing hearing if they thought Howell would be better served in the juvenile school than in an adult prison.

"I certainly think he should go somewhere to pay retribution for what he has done. But I would also want him to get help," said Joni Martin, a social worker with the Geneva County Department of Human

Resources who supervised Howell for past two years.

But Chief Assistant District Attorney Bill Filmore asked Martin about reports that Howell did not show remorse during group therapy sessions.

"The therapist felt he was not making progress," Martin said. "She said he did not show empathy for the victim."

But Martin also said the therapist would often waver from that opinion.

Howell's grandmother testified she was among the adult family members who supervised his care while he has been out on bond awaiting the sentence. She said he did yard work and household chores and "is a great pleasure to us."

When Howell took the stand dressed in a white shirt and tie, he was visibly shaken and told his attorney he was nervous.

"I'm sorry for what I put you through," he said to the victim's family seated in the courtroom. "I know I messed up."

But the victim's mother said she preferred the sentence to include further incarceration. "I don't want this to happen to another little girl," she said.

She related the changes in her daughter's life, characterizing the girl as very insecure and easily frightened. "She cannot live in peace."

Filmore said he thought the sentence was appropriate.

Although the sentence was 30 years, Howell could be eligible for parole in 10 years.

Howell was also ordered to pay court costs, attorney fees, restitution and \$100 to the Crime Victims Fund.