

## Man convicted of burning city children's hands

BY KEITH EPPS / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

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**A** man who burned his girlfriend's two little girls—because he said he wanted to teach them to stop sucking their thumbs—was convicted of four felony charges Thursday.

Demarco Edward Singleton, who will turn 20 next week, was found guilty of aggravated malicious wounding, unlawful wounding and two counts of felony child abuse in Fredericksburg Circuit Court.

He faces the possibility of up to life in prison when he is sentenced June 20.

The girls were ages 2 and 4 on Aug. 30 when Singleton was watching them on Greystone Court off Fall Hill Avenue in the city.

Their mother came home that day and found both girls injured, Fredericksburg prosecutor Travis Bird said. The most seriously injured child, the 2-year-old, was in bed whining and holding her hand.

Bird said that child had severe burns from her fingertips to her wrist. She was taken to VCU Medical Center in Richmond, where she stayed for about a month.

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Bird said the child has permanent damage and will likely require more surgeries in the future.

The 4-year-old child was also burned, but has recovered from her injuries.

According to the evidence, Singleton gave several different stories to Detective Carlos Reyes regarding how the girls were injured. He first said a pot of boiling water was accidentally knocked off the stove. Then later he said he held their hands under hot water to teach them not to suck their thumbs.

Bird said he doesn't think Singleton ever told the whole truth, but doctors said the younger child's injuries were consistent with having her hand immersed in extremely hot liquid. Bird said the skin in the burned area turned from brown to white, and the child will continue to have increased sensitivity to light and heat.

The prosecution believes Singleton used the faucet on the older child and placed the younger child's hand in boiling water, Bird said.

Singleton, who has been in jail since his arrest, entered Alford pleas to the charges, meaning that while he doesn't admit guilt, he acknowledges the evidence is sufficient for convictions. He is represented by attorneys Sarah Abernathy and Ron Hurr.

The mother was pregnant with Singleton's baby at the time of the offense and has since had her third child.

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