

Man gets two years in Spotsylvania child abuse case

Keith Epps

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A man whose young son wound up with serious injuries last year while he was supposed to be taking care of him was ordered Wednesday to spend two years in prison.

Rodney Eugene Richards was sentenced to a total of 24 years with all but two years suspended. Richards, a King George County native who turned 22 Wednesday, was previously convicted of two counts of child abuse, two counts of unlawful wounding and two counts of child cruelty.

Judge Ricardo Rigual sentenced Richards following an emotional hearing in Spotsylvania Circuit Court. People packed the courtroom to support Richards, including several members of the King George Sheriff's Office. Richards was in the process of doing an internship with the sheriff's office as part of his plan to become a deputy after he turned 21.

According to the evidence presented at trial, Richards had been with the then 11-week old baby in July last year when his wife came home and found her son in obvious distress.

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The child was taken to a hospital and doctors found injuries that included a broken leg, bleeding on the brain and ribs that had previously been broken.

Richards insisted that he'd done nothing to hurt his son, but Rigual said the evidence presented against him during a two-day trial in late August was "overwhelming."

Defense attorney Marcel Jones Wednesday presented multiple witnesses letters attesting to Richards' positive attributes. Witnesses described him in glowing terms, calling him "honorable, respectful and compassionate." Many expressed shock at learning that he'd gotten into trouble.

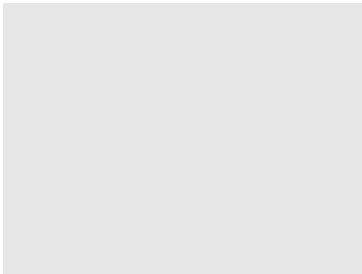
Prosecutor Crystal Montague-Holland said that in a courtroom full of Richards supporters, it was her job to speak for the baby. “This child suffered horrendous injuries,” Montague-Holland said. “This wasn’t a one-time injury. This was repeated abuse.”

Jones asked Rigual to sentence Richards toward the lower end of the recommended sentencing guidelines, which called for an active sentence of eight months to just over two years.

Jones pointed out the mass support Richards has and his lack of any previous criminal record. “I’m not trying to minimize what happened to baby Rodney,” Jones said. “I am asking for leniency. [Richards] has been punished already.”

Montague-Holland responded: “Baby Rodney was not given any leniency or mercy.”

Rigual said the injuries suffered by the child warranted a sentence well above the guidelines. But he said he took into account the huge outpouring of support for Richards and the life he lived prior to the incidents.



Richards

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