

## Man guilty of beating toddler

BY KEITH EPPS

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**A** Fredericksburg man who pummeled a 17-month-old girl during a drunken rage pleaded guilty to five charges Tuesday.

Warren O. Whistleman Jr., 57, was convicted in Fredericksburg Circuit Court of unlawful wounding, felony child neglect and three misdemeanor counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

He faces a maximum penalty of 13 years in prison when he is sentenced Nov. 7.

According to the evidence presented by prosecutor Travis Bird, Whistleman was a friend of the child's mother and stepfather.

He had periodically baby-sat the girl and her three siblings—ages 3, 4 and 6—for about a year.

He had the kids for two days at his home starting April 12 and drank heavily the entire time, according to the evidence.

One of Whistleman's friends called the girl's parents after seeing Whistleman punching the child while shouting, "Shut up, you [expletive]."

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The parents called police after finding bruises all over the child's body. One of her brothers had a handprint bruise across his face, Bird said.

Whistleman told police that he suffers “blackouts” when he drinks and doesn’t remember hitting the child. He drank at least a half-gallon of Jack Daniel’s whiskey while he was supposed to be caring for the children.

Judge Gordon Willis revoked Whistleman’s bond and sent him to jail Tuesday following his pleas, though defense attorney Benjamin Burchett pleaded for Whistleman to remain free until sentencing.

Burchett said the Whistleman had no prior felony record and had no problems when he watched the children on other occasions.

He also pointed out that the recommended state sentencing guidelines call for no prison time in Whistleman’s case and that he has stopped drinking.

Bird argued that no matter what the guidelines say, “Anyone who beats up on a 17-month-old child deserves to spend some time in jail.”

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