

## Yakez D. Cornett Plea

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

District Attorney Matthew Van Houten announced today that Yakez D. Cornett, 22, of Ithaca, appeared in Tompkins County Court today and entered guilty pleas to the crimes of Assault in the First Degree and Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree. Assault in the First Degree is a Class B Violent Felony under the New York State Penal Law, punishable by a sentence of between five (5) and twenty-five (25) years in state prison. Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Second Degree is a Class C Violent Felony, punishable by a sentence of three and one half (3 ½) to fifteen (15) years.

Cornett admitted to possessing a .380 semi-automatic handgun, which he used to shoot a man on the Ithaca Commons during the early morning hours of April 9, 2017, causing the man to suffer a serious physical injury. He has been remanded to the Tompkins County Jail pending sentencing.

The Ithaca Police Department conducted the investigation with assistance and support from the Tompkins County Sheriff's Department and the New York State Police.

Sentencing has been scheduled for October 27, 2017 before Judge John Rowley.

## Matthew J. Williams Sentenced

Monday, August 28, 2017

Tompkins County District Attorney Matthew Van Houten announced that Matthew J. Williams, 33, was sentenced to 6 years in state prison followed by 10 years of post-release supervision for the sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl.

A Tompkins County Court jury convicted Williams of Sexual Abuse in the First Degree and two counts of Endangering the Welfare of a Child on May 19, 2017, following a one-week trial. During the course of the trial, Assistant District Attorney Diane Lama and Deputy District Attorney Andrew Bonavia presented evidence and testimony to prove that on the evening of June 17, 2016, Williams purchased alcohol for two 12-year-old girls and drove them into the Danby State Forest to a secluded campsite. While there, he served the girls alcohol and later sexually abused one of the girls in the back of his pick-up truck. The girls ran away from Williams and hid in the woods for hours. They were located at approximately 7:00 a.m. the following morning.

Honorable Gerald Keene sentenced Williams to 6 years in state prison followed by 10 years of post-release supervision.

The case was investigated by the New York State Police.

## Kenneth Benjamin, III Verdict

Thursday, August 24, 2017

Tompkins County District Attorney Matthew Van Houten announced the trial conviction of Kenneth Benjamin, III of Enfield, New York on August 23, 2017. The defendant was found guilty by a jury in Tompkins County Court of Menacing a Police Officer or Peace Officer, a Class D felony, and the Class A misdemeanors of Menacing in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Weapon in the Fourth Degree, and Endangering the Welfare of a Child.

The jury deliberated for approximately three hours before reaching a verdict. Hon. Scott A. Miller was the presiding judge. The defendant faces a maximum state prison sentence of 8 years followed by up to 5 years of post-release supervision. Sentencing is scheduled for October 27, 2017 at 1:15 p.m.

Assistant District Attorney Eliza Filipowski handled the prosecution of the case and the case was investigated by the Tompkins County Sheriff's Department. "Eliza Filipowski should be recognized for her hard work, exceptional preparation, and professionalism in prosecuting this case. The result of the trial is consistent with the promotion of public safety in our community and recognizes the difficult job performed on a daily basis by our dedicated law enforcement officers," said DA Van Houten.

## Michael A. Davis Indictment

Thursday, July 27, 2017

District Attorney Matthew Van Houten announced today that Michael Davis, 45, of Ithaca, has been indicted by the Tompkins County Grand Jury in a two count indictment charging him with one count of Arson in the First Degree and one count of Murder in the First Degree.

Davis is charged with starting a fire in a building which caused the death of Josie Berrios, 28, in the evening or early morning hours of June 12-13, 2017. He has been remanded to the Tompkins County Jail without bail.

The Ithaca Police Department, New York State Police and New York State Fire Investigations Unit conducted the investigation.

District Attorney Van Houten explained that there was no evidence which would have supported the classification of the charged offenses as hate crimes under New York State law. Penal Law Section 485.05 states that a person commits a hate crime when he or she intentionally commits a crime or selects a victim in whole or in substantial part because of a belief or perception regarding the race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion, religious practice, age, disability or sexual orientation of a person, regardless of whether the belief or perception is correct. While it is inappropriate to comment on the specifics of the evidence in an ongoing case, the investigation has revealed no proof establishing the criteria for charging the defendant with a hate crime as defined by the Penal Law.

Penal Law Section 125.27(1)(a)(vii), states that a person is guilty of Murder in the First Degree when, with intent to cause the death of another person, he causes the death of such person; and the victim was killed while the defendant was in the course of committing or attempting to commit Arson in the First Degree. The maximum sentence available for Murder in the First Degree is life without the possibility of parole.

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NOTE: An indictment, like any criminal charge, is solely an accusation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

## Matthew J. Williams Verdict

Friday, May 19, 2017

Tompkins County District Attorney Matthew Van Houten announced the trial conviction of Matthew J. Williams, 33, for the sexual assault of a twelve-year-old girl at a campsite located in the Danby State Forest. The defendant was found guilty by a jury in Tompkins County Court of Sexual Abuse in the First Degree and two counts of Endangering the Welfare of a Child.

As proven at trial, on the evening of June 17, 2016, Williams purchased alcohol for two 12-year-old girls and drove them into the woods to a secluded campsite. While there, he served the girls alcohol and later sexually abused one of the girls in the back of his pick-up truck. The girls ran away from Williams and hid in the woods for hours. They were located at approximately 7:00 a.m. the following morning.

The defendant took the stand in his defense. The jury deliberated for approximately five hours before reaching a verdict. The defendant faces a maximum state prison sentence of 7 years followed by up to 10 years of post-release supervision. Sentencing is scheduled for August 25, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.

Assistant District Attorney Diane Lama and Deputy District Attorney Andrew Bonavia handled the prosecution of the case. The case was investigated by the New York State Police.