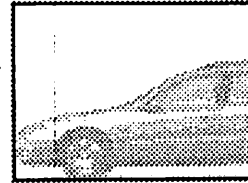


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Civil-rights leader is sentenced to 3 years **Ron Berry must also register as a sex offender**

By JOSEPH GERTH
The Courier-Journal

EXINGTON, Ky. -- A former Lexington civil-rights leader was sentenced yesterday to three years in prison for sodomizing six boys during the 1970s and 1980s.

Ron Berry, who founded and ran an agency to help disadvantaged youths, will also be placed on the state's sex-offender registry for at least 10 years and possibly for the rest of his life.

Fayette Circuit Judge Lewis Paisley rejected a motion to set aside the jury's verdict and a defense request for probation, saying that allowing Berry to walk free would diminish the seriousness of the crime.

Berry, 56, was convicted of engaging in sexual acts with boys between the ages of 12 and 15 while he was director of Lexington's Micro-City Government, the agency he founded to help poor children.

Paisley followed a jury's recommendation and sentenced Berry to three years.

A Jefferson County jury found Berry guilty on 12 counts of third-degree sodomy on March 10. The trial had been moved to Louisville because of extensive pretrial publicity.

Frankfort lawyer Bill Johnson said he plans to appeal the case to the Kentucky Court of Appeals. Berry was ordered to pay a \$10,000 appeal bond by Wednesday or to report to the Fayette County Jail.

Dozens of people wrote to Paisley -- most asking for leniency -- and hundreds signed petitions asking for a light sentence.

Paisley said he had also received e-mail messages about the case, "the first time that's happened."

In seeking a lighter sentence, Johnson argued that Berry had done much good in his time as a civil-rights activist and as director of Micro-City Government. He said Berry had accompanied some youths who had run afoul of the law to court even when their families had turned their back on them.

He argued that the community would be better served if Berry were sentenced to probation so he could continue to help in the community. Johnson noted that

none of the charges Berry was convicted of occurred in the last 13 years.

Fayette County Commonwealth's Attorney Ray Larson, however, argued that the jury had already taken into consideration Berry's standing in the community and the good works he had done. And, Larson said, Berry was in a position of trust and had abused that position.

He urged Paisley to sentence him as the jury recommended.

Paisley said the jury considered the evidence and believed the three-year sentence was appropriate. He agreed.

The only remaining question is whether, under a new Kentucky law, Berry must remain on the sex-offender registry for 10 years or for his entire life. Paisley said he will try to rule on that within a week.

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