

Judge is torn in case of D.C. child molester

Therapy or prison? He can't decide

By Amy Koval
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A D.C. Superior Court judge yesterday delayed sentencing for a teen who sodomized three young girls, saying he cannot decide between a lengthy prison term or trying to help the defendant with counseling and less time behind bars.

Earl Roosevelt Knott, an 18-year-old high school dropout, could get up to 60 years in prison for the crimes. But Judge Truman Morrison said he is so torn over the case that he wants to consult other judges before handing down a sentence.

"On the one hand, Mr. Knott is a person who has had a life of remarkable dysfunction and depri-

vation," the judge said yesterday. "He has been a victim [of sexual abuse] himself and had no normal human support as a person growing up.

"At the same time, these are crimes of radical seriousness. Mr. Knott's actions have had a profound impact on these children that will last their entire lives long," he said.

Knott—who has been convicted of sexually abusing a total of five children, including a 5-year-old boy in New York—will be sentenced June 7 for sodomizing two cousins and a third girl, a family friend who is now 6. He is already serving an 18-month sentence for sodomizing a niece in December

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while he was out on bail and visiting relatives in Montgomery County.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Robin Ashton said Knott, known by the youngsters he molested as "Buddy," is "too far gone" to be helped.

"He is a very sick individual," she said. "He cannot control his behavior."

Knott apparently plied his victims with candy in order to get close to them. Mrs. Ashton cited a pre-sentencing report that quoted him as saying: "I can always get kids to do whatever I want to do. . . . I just give them something. I'm very good with children."

But Knott's court-appointed attorney argued that his client is remorseful, that he admitted guilt and that he has asked for help.

"There's a strong possibility that he could benefit from [therapy and treatment]," said Thomas Abbenante. "This is a man who didn't come in here and give you a song and dance. This is a man who

came in here and told you everything."

Judge Morrison, who has been on the bench since 1979, was described in a 1988 Legal Times article as a middle-of-the-road jurist who tends to "give close calls to the defendants." Before becoming a judge, he spent nine years in the Public Defender's Office.

Knott and his stepgrandfather, William Ward, were accused of abusing the 6- and 7-year-old girls, who had been taken from their mother by the city amid allegations of neglect and turned over to their grandmother, Ward's wife.

Ward's record of 17 felony convictions—including two sex assaults—was not checked by the D.C. Department of Human Services until the 6-year-old was hit by a car and doctors at the hospital found signs of sexual abuse, Mrs. Ashton said.

Ward and Knott were subsequently charged with having sex with the two girls over a period of two years at the home they shared on Bruce Street SE.

Ward was convicted of five counts of child molestation in December and sentenced to 15 years in prison.