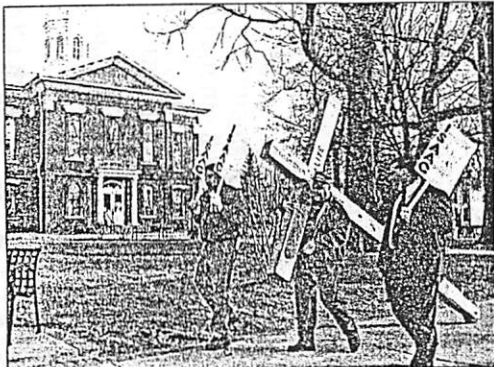


"What everyone has to realize is that" the cases "are unusually difficult and must be judged based on their individual merits," Commonwealth's Attorney Kim Snell said.



Art Robles, left, and Jeff Dangler carried signs, and Randy Guest toled a cross during a protest at the Oldham County Courthouse.

Protesters urge more prison time for sex offenders

Case involving 2 girls spurs formation of watchdog group

By TONIA HOLBROOK
 The Courier-Journal

About a dozen people protested at the Oldham County Courthouse last week, saying that sex offenders too often get probation instead of time behind bars.

The demonstration was organized by Imprisonment for Sexual Abuse Against Children, a new Oldham County group formed by Howard King of Louisville.

The protest revolved around a case in which two girls under age 10 were molested in 1998. Last week, Leslie Darryl Edens Jr., 30, of Trimble County pleaded guilty to first-degree sexual abuse and third-degree sodomy of the children.

Edens accepted a plea agreement in Oldham Circuit Court that reduced two of four counts against him. Under the agreement, he must undergo a sexual-offender risk-assessment test to determine his risk of further crimes and register as a sex offender. He could be sentenced to up to 15 years. Sentencing is scheduled for May 3.

King, a retired maintenance worker for Jefferson County Public Schools, said prosecutors don't do enough to protect children from sex offenders.

"A majority of sex offenders against children are given probated sentences and are put right back out in the community," he said. "We're just getting tired of it — that ... nothing happens to them."

But Commonwealth's Attorney Kim Snell disagreed, saying there is nothing lax about his prosecution of such crimes. "We do take



Melissa Cole was among a dozen or so demonstrators.

them very seriously and intend to prosecute them vigorously. . . .

"But what everyone has to realize is that they are unusually difficult (cases to prosecute) and must be judged based on their individual merits," Snell said, adding that he can't ignore the wishes of victims and their families.

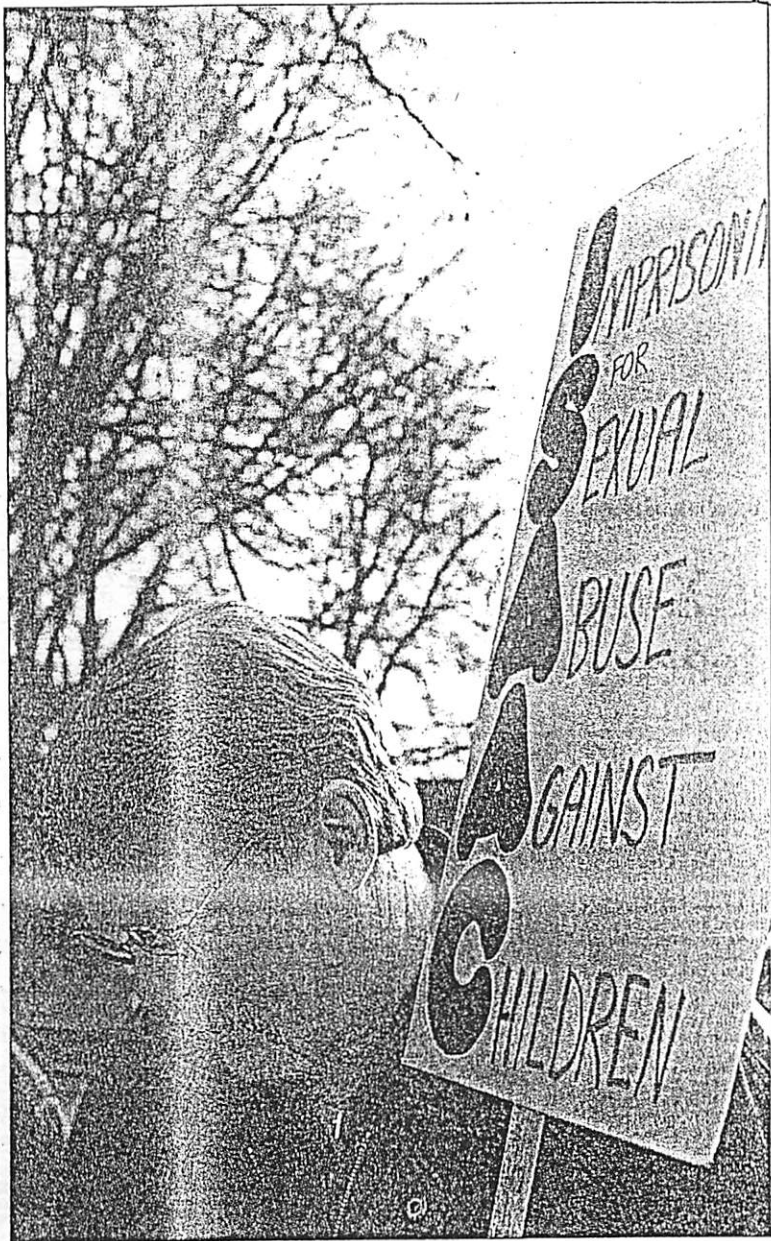
Edens was indicted in April 1999 by a Trimble County grand jury on two counts of first-degree sodomy and two counts of first-degree sexual abuse. In the plea agreement, the sodomy counts were reduced from first-degree to third-degree, which means a lighter sentence.

King said he believes the court system sees child sexual abuse as "just another case" and that justice isn't done when abusers are put back on the streets.

The courts are "more interested in clearing their dockets than protecting these children," King said.

Art Robles of Louisville, who carried a large wooden cross around

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PHOTOS BY MARY ANN LYONS, THE COURIER-JOURNAL

The courts are "more interested in clearing their dockets than protecting these children" against sexual abuse, said protest organizer Howard King, above.

Suspects in some other pending cases

Here are some of the other cases of child sexual abuse pending in Oldham Circuit Court:

Nathaniel Walters, 40, of La Grange is charged with the rape, sodomy and sexual abuse of five Oldham County girls. One of them alleges that Walters abused her 11 times while she was between the ages of 8 and 15, according to the indictment. It says two of the others were 14 when the alleged sexual contact occurred, and the remaining two were 15.

In a statement, Walters admitted having sex with one of the girls but said it was consensual and he didn't know the girl was so young.

As of Monday, no date had been set for Walters' trial.

Walters is in the Oldham County Jail in lieu of \$51,000 bond on the rape, sodomy and sexual abuse charges and a cocaine-possession charge.

Peter H. "Buddy" Eiden, 46, of southwestern Jefferson County is scheduled for trial in Oldham Circuit Court on March 27 on charges of molesting three girls, ages 8 to 11, between 1979 and 1983. Two of the alleged crimes took place at the home of Eiden's parents in Oldham County, and a third is alleged to have occurred at a church in the county.

He is also scheduled for two trials in Jefferson County, on March 16 and July 31, on charges of sexually abusing and sodomizing a total of 11 children, including one boy, between 1973 and 1979. Jefferson County prosecutors have said that some of those children are relatives.

Eiden is free after posting a \$10,000 bond in Oldham County. He also is free on bond in Jefferson County.

Darrell Sheehan, 39, of Crestwood is charged with 10

counts of sodomy, one count of attempted sodomy and 10 counts of sexual abuse involving six children.

His trial was originally scheduled for Jan. 8, then Feb. 27. However, because Fritz will retire April 16 and his successor would probably have to sentence Sheehan, the case will either be assigned to a special judge or the trial will be postponed until the governor appoints someone to take over the judgeship. Sheehan is free on bond.

Donald Edens, 62, of Trimble County is charged with sodomizing and attempting to rape a boy between 1968 and 1976 and sexually abusing two girls in 1963 and 1968. Each was younger than 12 at the time. He was indicted in March 2000 on a total of 51 counts.

He is in the Oldham County Jail in lieu of \$75,000 bond.

Protesters target child sexual abuse

Continued from Page One

the courthouse during the demonstration, agreed. "If you sexually abuse a child, you should go to prison." Robles was a minister in California until he began traveling across the country carrying the cross.

King said he and Robles formed their group recently because they couldn't find an advocacy group in Oldham County working specifically in the interest of sexually abused children.

"We are here to let people know that these are God's children," King said.

"The children of Kentucky have got to be protected, and they are sending these sex offenders out on the street on probated sentences. We can't allow this to happen any-

more. We've got to do something about it."

There are dozens of open cases of sex offenses against children in Oldham County. For example, the day the protesters were outside the courthouse, at least seven of the 53 cases on Circuit Judge Dennis Fritz's docket involved sex crimes against children.

That's too many, Commonwealth's Attorney Snell said. "They were rare things to see when I first started doing this 20 years ago. And now it seems like it's about a third of what I do."

Snell said that more victims of child sexual abuse are coming forward because more resources are available to help them.

"The schools are looking for it; the social agencies are looking for it."

Others participating in the demonstration said the pursuit of justice can take a long time.

Linda Kasey of Crestwood said she carried a sign along the sidewalk because she knows someone who was molested.

Kasey expressed confidence in Fritz, but said with so many cases on his docket it may take a while to resolve them. "It's an overload here."

The presence of King and Robles' group will not end with last week's demonstration, Robles said. It plans to monitor similar cases in the 12th Judicial Circuit (Oldham, Henry and Trimble counties) and push for legislation to mandate prison sentences for sex offenders who abuse children.

"This is just the beginning. It's not over yet."