

# Collaboration with DA's assistance dog "Chief," leads to New Bedford child rapist conviction

Thanks to a collaborative effort from police, prosecutors, Children's Advocacy Center staff and "Chief," the Bristol County District Attorney's new assistance dog, a 44-year-old New Bedford man was convicted of aggravated rape of a child and sentenced to serve 15 to 20 years in state prison, District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III announced.

Lawrence Trahan was convicted on May 6th of aggravated rape of a child, and indecent assault and battery on a person under the age of 14 after a three-day trial in Fall River Superior Court.

In December of 2017, the first report of a potential child rape involving this defendant was made to New Bedford police detectives. As a result of this information, the district attorney's office set up forensic interviews with the alleged victim at the Bristol County Children's Advocacy Center. During those interviews, the victim, a 10-year-old girl, told investigators this defendant touched her in "weird places like her arms legs boobies and butt." She said this happened more than 20 times. She specifically said the defendant put his tongue in her vagina and his penis in her buttocks. The defendant knew the victim in this case.

During trial preparation, the victim in the case was having difficulty talking any further about the sexual assaults and traumatic experiences she went through, and it was unclear whether she would even be able to testify at trial. At that time, Chief and his handler, Samantha Dias, who works for the

district attorney's office as a forensic interviewer, met with the victim. During the victim's time with Chief, her extreme anxiety subsided and she began to feel more confident in her ability to testify about the sexual assaults.

Chief is the newest member of the Bristol County District Attorney's Office whose primary duties will be providing support to children during forensic interviews at the Children's Advocacy Center of Bristol County. Children and vulnerable adults participate in forensic interviews when there are allegations of any type of abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, witness to violence). In forensic interviews, victims are asked to share details of their traumatic experience, and offering an assistance dog, when appropriate, can provide those being interviewed with a sense of comfort and safety.

Chief joins the District Attorney's Office from NEADS World Class Service Dogs, a nonprofit located in Princeton, MA. The presence of this steady, well-trained dog in the justice system can humanize stressful situations, have a calming effect, help build trust and assist prosecutors in gathering more information about a case which in turn leads to better prosecution efforts. They can also provide a sense of normalcy for vulnerable crime victims, including, children who have experienced a form of trauma and developmentally delayed adults.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Matthew Friedel, and the 15 to 20 year state prison sentence was imposed by Judge Renee Dupuis. Upon the defendant's eventual release from prison, he will immediately be placed on supervised probation for an additional five years.

The terms of his probation will include GPS monitoring, the completion sex offender treatment, prohibition from living in a household with a minor child, no unsupervised contact with children, no employment that puts him in contact with children

and no volunteerism that includes contact with children. The defendant must also register as a sex offender.

"I am pleased the jury held the defendant accountable for sexually abusing this young child. Unfortunately he had access to the child through his relationships with the victims' mother. Sadly, the victim's mother supported the defendant during the trial. I commend the victim for her courage in disclosing the abuse and perseverance during delays in the case," District Attorney Quinn said. "I would like to thank the entire investigatory and prosecution team, including our new support dog, Chief, for their efforts in this case. A substantial prison sentence was warranted."