

Taunton Man Who Attacked Dog With Machete Convicted

A 45-year-old Taunton man who attacked an American Staffordshire Terrier with a machete last year and while doing so, also injured the dog's owner, pleaded guilty this week to animal cruelty and assault charges in Fall River Superior Court, Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III announced.

Thomas Vargas pleaded guilty a two-count indictment charging him with animal cruelty and assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.

On September 18, 2017, the dog's owner was walking her dog, Baby Bear, down the Church Street in Taunton when the defendant approached them with a machete and stabbed the dog twice. As the Defendant was trying to strike the dog, he hit the dog owner in the leg. Two independent civilian witnesses said the attack was unprovoked by the dog and that the defendant was the sole aggressor. They also told police the dog, who has survived the attack, was leashed prior to the attack.

After pleading guilty to the indictment, a sentencing hearing was held before Judge William F. Sullivan during which time Assistant District Attorney Patrick Driscoll argued that due to the defendant's lengthy criminal record and the lawlessness involved in the daylight attack on an animal and its owner, the defendant should serve three-and-a-half years in state prison. The defense, however, requested a more lenient two-and-a-half year county jail sentence, with six months to serve and the balance of the sentence suspended for two years.

Judge Sullivan handed down a sentence in line with the defendant's request, sentencing Mr. Vargas to two-and-a-half

years in county jail, with only six months to serve. The balance of the sentence was suspended for two years, meaning if the defendant is charged with new crimes during that time period, he could be forced to serve the remainder of the two-and-a-half year county jail term. The judge also ordered the defendant to wear a GPS monitoring device for the next six months.

The defendant's criminal record consists of a 2015 conviction on an assault and battery in Attleboro, a 10 year federal commitment on a drug case in 1997, a three to five year state prison sentence for assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, and several other crimes.

"This defendant showed no respect for the law by attacking a dog and its owner in broad daylight on a city street," District Attorney Quinn said. "His lawlessness is not surprising based on his significant criminal history. He should have been ordered to serve more jail time, but at least there is some accountability."