

## Jury begins deliberations in Menifee man's molestation trial

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A jury Thursday began considering whether to believe a 9-year-old girl's testimony that she was raped in her Menifee bedroom by her foster father, an ordained minister, while his wife was at home.

"It seems crazy that a guy would rape a child while his wife is downstairs," prosecutor Burke Strunsky told jurors. "A child molester will do what it takes to satisfy that need."

One of Joseph Patrick Billock's two defense lawyers said the 50-year-old defendant has been accused of something he never did.

"I think this story is impossible to believe," said Attorney Douglas Gilliland. "There is stuff going on with this little girl we may never know about."

Billock is on trial at the Southwest Justice Center in French Valley, charged with two counts of raping his former foster daughter during the 40-plus days she lived with him and his wife in 2005. If convicted, he faces 30-years-to-life in prison.

The Press-Enterprise does not publish the names of minors who are alleged to be victims of sexual assault.

During closing statements Thursday, Gilliland laid out some facts about the girl's tumultuous life.

The child was taken from her mother, who was a drug addict, when she was 6, he said. She had lived in a group home, with her grandparents, a foster family in Temecula, the Billock family, her maternal aunt, and later another family, he said.

The girl did not tell her cousin that she was raped until about 14 months after she alleges it happened in 2005, Gilliland said.

She came up with the story at the same time she learned that her twin siblings were going to live with their mother again, but she was not, Gilliland said.

Prosecutor Strunsky said the girl's disclosure did come while she living with her aunt. It was at a time when she felt safe and protected, which experts testified is normal. There is no evidence that she concocted the tale to get attention, he said.

There is no way a child so young would know so much about sex and the male anatomy unless she was, in fact, raped, Strunsky said.

"You just can't make this stuff up, especially when you are nine years old," he said.

Both lawyers pointed out that Billock's wife, Wendy, gave testimony contrary to the child's account of what happened.

The girl said she tried to tell Wendy Billock, but the woman was too busy to talk her. The girl also said she actually told Wendy Billock, who did not believe her.

Wendy Billock testified that the girl never came to her with allegations of sexual abuse.

Gilliland said Wendy Billock is a credible witness.

"Is Wendy's testimony reasonable doubt enough?" Gilliland asked. "Do we doubt anything that Wendy says? This is a case where I feel like there is reasonable doubt all over the place."

Strunsky said Wendy Billock has lost their foster children because of her husband's actions. She is one of his victims, he said.

"He's fooled his wife. He's fooled the people who have come in here," the prosecutor said. "Do not let the defense fool you."

The jury is expected to resume deliberations today.

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