

# Moorestown cop, girlfriend found guilty

**By Danielle Camilli Staff writer | Posted: Friday, April 27, 2012 2:30 pm**

MOUNT HOLLY — The jury just returned a verdict finding a suspended Moorestown police officer and his former girlfriend guilty of most charges against them in the sex assaults of minors over several years.

The jury couldn't reach a verdict on 19 charges pertaining to one victim.

Robert Melia Jr., 42, of Moorestown, and Heather Lewis, 36, of Pemberton Township, were found guilty of multiple counts of aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault, criminal sexual contact, invasion of privacy, and endangering the welfare of a child.

In all, he was found guilty of 22 counts and she was convicted on 26 counts. Lewis was found not guilty on one count.

The judge revoked their bail and they were taken into custody. Lewis protested saying she had to sign over custody of her daughter to her parents, but she was still handcuffed and taken to jail.

Melia was also charged and found guilty of official misconduct since the allegations span the time he served as a patrolman in Moorestown from 2000 to 2008. He was suspended when he and Lewis, a mother of two and a former nursing assistant, were arrested and charged in 2008.

"We want to thank the members of the jury for their hard work on this case, which was very difficult to hear. I also want to express my appreciation for the tireless efforts of the prosecution team," said Burlington County Prosecutor Robert D. Bernardi. "Without their dedication this verdict would not have been achieved. To the victims, I extend my admiration for their courage in testifying against the defendants. And finally to the defendants, they will now face the full weight of the sentencing court and the state looks forward to that day."

Melia and Lewis could be sentenced to more than 50 years in prison, officials said.

The defense contended that the former couple were the target of a conspiracy driven by one of the victims' stepfather's efforts to divert police attention from his own illegal, sexual relationship with the then-13-year-old girl. Years later, she had his child, and he is now charged with aggravated sexual assault against her. But she denied the alleged abuse was happening when she first accused the defendants in 2008.

The jury could not reach verdicts on the counts pertaining to this victim and the state determine at a later date whether to retry the defendants on the hung charges, officials said.

The defense also argued that the victims' statements and testimony were filled with inconsistencies and admitted lies, creating reasonable doubt.

The state's case included testimony from the four victims and detectives, and graphic videotapes of two of the alleged assaults. The tape shows Lewis sexually assaulting the incapacitated, blindfolded and bound teen, according to the state.

The prosecution alleged that Melia, while not seen in the videos, was recording the assaults. Lewis testified that it was taped by an ex-girlfriend, despite what looks like a muscular male arm in a portion of one of the videos shot in Melia's bedroom and found on the hard drive of his computer.

The defense argued that the taped sex acts were consensual and that the teen was 18 years old.

The woman in the video, now 24, testified that she had no recollection of the alleged assault and never consented to having sex with either Melia or Lewis. She also testified about other assaults by the defendants.

She and the other victims testified that they were molested as preteens and teenagers at various times between 2000 and 2008.

Three female witnesses, all longtime family friends of Lewis, claimed they were sexually assaulted in the Cottage Avenue home in Moorestown the defendants shared before they ended their relationship. They said they would sleep over at the house and at various times were assaulted by one or both of the defendants. Some claimed the couple assaulted them with various sexual devices.

The only male witness in the case accused Lewis of coming to his baby-sitting job with one of the other accusers and sexually assaulting him. He and the girl testified that Lewis ordered the girl to perform a sex act on the boy.

Charges of animal cruelty against Melia for allegedly performing lewd acts with calves on a Southampton farm were dismissed before the more serious child sex assault case trial began. A judge found the state did not present the grand jury with enough evidence to sustain the charge.

Authorities said they found video of the acts when they searched Melia's home, but did not show that recording to the grand jury.