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PRESS RELEASE

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Chico Man Found Guilty by Jury of Rape

In one of the first jury trials since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic which shut down jury trials in March of 2020, a Butte County jury today found a Chico man guilty of raping a woman in a Chico alleyway in March of 2019.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the jury began hearing evidence on Monday after a week delay caused by the North Complex West Zone (Bear) Fire. Jury selection had begun on Monday, August 31.

Ramsey said Ishmael Smith, 35, previously homeless in Chico, met the victim, a then 25-year-old woman, as she was walking home from downtown Chico in the early morning hours of March 9, 2019.

Ramsey said the victim bravely testified at the trial about her night of horror, describing how Smith came up to her and began talking to her as she walked. She did not know Smith. As they passed an alley off Salem Street, however, Smith violently shoved her into the alley and then forced her to the ground, where she was raped. Smith then let her go.

The victim further testified that after the rape, she walked home crying with Smith following her. The victim found her car and locked herself inside, fearing that if she went inside her home; he would know where she lived.

The victim's sister also testified at trial that she got a panicked phone call from the victim around 4:00 a.m. that morning. The sister then drove to meet the victim and took her to the Enloe Hospital.

Jacqueline Winters-Hall, an Enloe nurse and part of Butte County's Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), testified she responded to Enloe Hospital that morning and conducted a specialized forensic sexual assault exam on the victim, including obtaining biological samples from the victim's body. The samples were sent to the California Department of Justice DNA Laboratory in Redding for DNA testing that day.

A criminalist from the Redding Lab, testified she created a genetic "fingerprint" from the unknown assailant's DNA and submitted it to CODIS, a database of DNA information that

includes known offenders. On April 22, 2019, the database identified Ishmael Smith as the suspect.

Chico Police Detective James Parrott testified that after learning Smith's identity, he authored an arrest warrant. Acting on information that Smith may have fled to Los Angeles, Parrott sought the help of Los Angeles police and Smith was arrested in the Los Angeles area on April 25.

Ramsey thanked the jurors for their hard work in extraordinary times. "This jury endured a very long process on a highly important case. From jury selection to verdict, the entire courtroom had to comply with COVID-19 safety measures, including wearing masks and social distancing. The jurors persevered even after the Bear Fire blanketed the county in suffocating smoke, causing additional delay. These jurors showed a truly remarkable commitment to their duty and ensure the defendant and the victim received a fair trial."

After the jury found Smith guilty of forcible rape, they further found Smith had previously been convicted of a gang-related second-degree robbery in 2006. This prior conviction is a "strike" and adds 13 years to his potential sentence.

Superior Court Judge Kristen Lucena, after thanking and dismissing the jury, set Smith's sentencing for October 15, 2020. Smith is facing 21 years in prison.

Smith remained in custody without bail.

