

Elizabeth man convicted on all charges for motel sexual assaults of couples

A Union County jury has returned guilty verdicts on all 60 counts filed against an Elizabeth man who terrorized, robbed, and sexually assaulted couples staying at local motels over the course of six weeks in 2012, acting Union County Prosecutor Michael A. Monahan announced Tuesday.

Rasheed Powell, 42, of Sheridan Avenue was convicted on 24 counts of first-degree aggravated sexual assault, 12 counts of second-degree sexual assault, eight counts of first-degree robbery, four counts of second-degree burglary, and 12 related weapons offenses following an eight-week trial before state Superior Court Judge Robert Kirsch and jury deliberations lasting three and a half days.

Beginning on Saturday, March 10, 2012, Powell targeted couples checking into motels along U.S. Routes 1&9 in Elizabeth and Linden, according to Prosecutor's Office Special Victims Unit Supervisor Caroline Lawlor and Assistant Prosecutor Tracy Boyd, who prosecuted the case. Powell would force his way into the motel rooms and order the couples to engage in sexual acts at gunpoint, then order the males into the bathroom while he sexually assaulted the female victims, Lawlor and Boyd said.

Using DNA and other forensic evidence, a joint investigation by the Prosecutor's Office's Sex Crimes Unit (today known as the Special Victims Unit), the Elizabeth Police Department, and the Linden Police Department, assisted by the Union County Sheriff's Office and Union County Police Department, resulted in Powell being identified as a suspect in the case. He was arrested on Monday, April 16, 2012 while at Springfield Municipal Court, where he was responding to a traffic summons.

Three of the incidents for which Powell was charged took place at the Swan Motel in Linden, with the others occurring at the Benedict (now Bentley) Motel in Linden and the Spring Lane Motel and Royal Motel, both in Elizabeth. Friday's convictions are connected to four of the six incidents, while Powell remains indicted and awaiting trial for the remaining two.

Powell has been held on \$3 million bail since his arrest, while also serving time in state prison for unrelated indictable crimes.

All eight victims and numerous law enforcement representatives, including two sexual assault nurse examiners who are part of the Union County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), testified at trial. The Prosecutor's Office would also like to recognize and thank all of those who directly participated in the investigation and prosecution of this case, including Office Lt. Patricia Gusmano and Detective Jennifer Smith, Elizabeth Police Department Detectives Benny Carvalho and James DiOrio (retired), and Linden Police Department Detective Dave Dehler (retired).

"The victims demonstrated great courage and fortitude in reliving these awful events through their painful testimony," acting Prosecutor Monahan said. "But because of their strength and resolve, combined with the diligence and professionalism of the entire law enforcement team, this defendant will never again have the opportunity to terrorize anyone in such fashion."

Sentencing in the case has been tentatively scheduled for Friday, May 4, 2018 before Judge Kirsch, at which time Powell will face a term of up to life in state prison.