



OFFICE OF  
**STATE ATTORNEY**  
FIRST JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF FLORIDA

May 12, 2014

**PRESS RELEASE**

State Attorney Bill Eddins announced today that Claude Russell Ratliff was found guilty of Lewd or Lascivious Molestation by a Santa Rosa County Jury on Friday, May 9, 2014.

Ratliff, 56 years of age, had molested a 9 year old girl while she was visiting at his Milton home during August 2012. In March 2013 the child told her parents about the abuse and they took her to a Pensacola hospital, which contacted the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office. During an interview at the Gulf Coast Kids House, the girl told investigators that Ratliff had come into the room where she was sleeping and molested her from behind. He had rubbed her private part and took the girl's hand and put it on his private part. A warrant was issued for Ratliff and he was arrested on May 6, 2013.

Sentencing is scheduled for July 8, 2014 before Circuit Judge John Miller. Ratliff faces a life sentence with a 25 year minimum mandatory prison term.

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State Attorney Bill Eddins also announced today that John David Thomas, Jr. was convicted on Wednesday of Lewd or Lascivious Molestation. The Santa Rosa County Jury deliberated for less than 15 minutes before finding that the 35 year old Thomas had molested an eight year old girl at a residence in Gulf Breeze in March 2013.

On March 6, 2013 the victim reported to her mother that Thomas had come into her room and touched her inappropriately. Thomas had been staying with the family for several days because he had recently moved to the area from Texas and had no place to stay. The Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office investigated the incident and arrested Thomas on a warrant on July 4, 2013. During the trial Thomas testified that he had come to Florida because there were no women in Texas.

Circuit Judge John Miller set sentencing for July 8, 2014. Thomas faces a possible life sentence with a minimum mandatory 25 years in prison.

Assistant State Attorney Cassandra Andres prosecuted both cases. For further information, contact Cassandra Andres at (850) 981-5500.