

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC DEFENDER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 11, 2018

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

PUBLIC DEFENDERS WIN 5 ACQUITTALS IN SINGLE AFTERNOON

San Francisco—Jurors deliberating in five separate felony trials returned with five acquittals in a single afternoon, San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi announced today.

The not guilty verdicts were delivered Tuesday afternoon.

- Jurors deliberated only an hour before acquitting a 20-year-old woman of a single felony charge of trying to prevent or deter an officer by threat. The young woman faced up to three years behind bars if convicted. Prosecutors accused the woman of telling police she planned to attack an officer who she described but whose name she didn't know. Her attorney, Deputy Public Defender Hien Ngoc Nguyen, argued that since police could not identify the officer they claimed the woman threatened, there was no victim and therefore no crime.
- A 26-year-old man was found not guilty of assault with a deadly weapon, assault with force likely to produce great bodily injury, threatening a police officer while resisting arrest and personal use of a deadly weapon. Jurors hung on a vandalism charge, and convicted the man only of two counts of misdemeanor simple assault. His attorney, Deputy Public Defender Christine Schenone, said jurors were outraged at the treatment her mentally ill client received at the hands of police. Officers chased him barefoot through the street, held him at gunpoint and pressed their knees into his neck as he bled on the ground from a self-inflicted knife wound. Police told alarmed citizens who were taping the encounter to stand back, and one officer instructed a passerby to "put away your phone, you idiot," evidence showed.
- A 31-year-old father and former child prodigy on the professional chess circuit was acquitted of felony carjacking with a gun allegation. Prosecutors alleged the man took keys to a Mini Cooper from a parking attendant at gunpoint before leading police on a chase. His attorney, Deputy Public Defender Sliman Nawabi, argued no gun was found and the attendant made up the story so he wouldn't get into trouble. Instead, Nawabi argued, his client took the car for a joyride after finding it with its keys inside. The client, who was convicted of the lesser charges of unlawful taking of a vehicle and evading an officer, is eligible for probation when he is sentenced later this month. He had faced up to 22 years.

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Bayview Magic
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- A 22-year-old man was acquitted of two counts of conspiracy to commit robbery, two counts of robbery, and conspiracy to commit theft by larceny. The man, who was facing more than eight years in prison, was convicted only of a single misdemeanor count of theft. His attorney, Deputy Public Defender Seiya Johnson, said jurors were troubled that police failed to search for easily-obtained video footage which could have cleared the client and ultimately determined the evidence presented was insufficient to convict.
- A 49-year-old man was cleared of multiple domestic violence-related charges involving three incidents after jurors found him credible on the stand and did not believe the complaining witness' testimony, said his attorney, Deputy Public Defender Crystal Lamb. Jurors hung on two charges and the judge dismissed three additional charges on the first day of trial due to lack of evidence. If convicted of all charges filed, he faced approximately eight years in state prison.

The string of trial victories was the result of zealous advocacy on the part of the five deputy public defenders and their teams of investigators and paralegals, Adachi said.

“These acquittals demonstrate that top-notch legal representation isn’t reserved for the rich,” Adachi said. “We would like to recognize the hard work of the attorneys, investigators and support staff who diligently worked on these cases and the jurors, who took time from their busy lives to sit in judgment of their fellow citizens.”

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