

NEWS

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Trenton Man Sentenced to 16 Months in Federal Prison For Assaulting a U.S. Postal Service Mail Carrier

(More)

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TRENTON – A Trenton man was sentenced to 16 months in federal prison today for assaulting a United States Postal Service mail carrier, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson also ordered Jose Anthony Vega-Lopez , 28, to pay a \$2,000 fine and to serve three years of supervised release upon the completion of the his prison term.

On June 9, 2006, after two days of deliberations, a jury convicted Vega-Lopez of one count of assault upon an employee of the Postal Service while engaged in the performance of official duties.

During the trial, the jury heard the testimony of nine government witnesses and viewed numerous pieces of evidence regarding Vega-Lopez's assault on the mail carrier. According to trial testimony and evidence, the victim regularly delivered mail in Trenton and had delivered mail to the residence of the defendant on prior occasions.

On Nov. 28, 2005, after the mail carrier delivered mail to the residence of Vega-Lopez, and while delivering mail at a house across the street from the defendant's home, Vega-Lopez began screaming at the mail carrier from his home, according to trial testimony. Vega-Lopez then crossed the street and confronted the mail carrier on a neighbor's porch.

According to testimony, Vega-Lopez initiated a physical confrontation by pushing the mail carrier, who then pushed the defendant back. According to testimony, Vega-Lopez then hit the mail carrier in the head – knocking the mail carrier off the porch of the neighbor's residence. Vega-Lopez then jumped off the porch and began kicking and punching the mail carrier. The victim briefly was able to regain his footing, but the defendant knocked the mail carrier down again and continued punching and kicking him on his face and body, inflicting bodily injury upon the victim, and, ultimately, according to testimony of several witnesses, knocking the victim unconscious.

According to testimony, several passersby were able to halt the assault and assisted the victim until an ambulance arrived. The victim was transported to an area hospital and treated for head injury, hematoma, abrasions and lacerations.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Thompson consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Dwight Ramsay, Postal Inspector for the United States Postal Service, under the direction of Thomas C. Van De Merlen, for investigation of the case.

The Government is represented by Assistant United States Attorney John J. Hoffman of the U.S. Attorney's Office Criminal Division in Trenton.

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Defense Attorneys: Lisa Van Hoeck, Esq. Asst. Fed. Public Defender