

# Man sentenced despite doubt

The defense said the wrong man was convicted. The judge sided with the victim.

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VIRGINIA BEACH — John Tingle was sentenced Wednesday to 10 years in prison for attacking a North End jogger, despite mounting evidence that Tingle could have been confused with a serial rapist still at large.

Tingle's attorney, Janet Rinaldi, believes the rapist, not Tingle, attacked the jogger. Rinaldi said new evidence that bolsters her theory was unfairly withheld until just before Tingle's sentencing.

On Wednesday, she asked Circuit Judge Thomas S. Shadrack for more time to investigate, but he denied the request.

The new evidence came in a letter sent to Rinaldi by prosecutors Tuesday afternoon. The letter said a woman who was raped while Tingle was in jail gave a description of her attacker that was nearly identical to a description of the attacker in the Tingle case.

When shown a composite drawing of the attacker in the Tingle case, she said it looked more like her assailant than the composite police had drawn from her description of her attacker.

Tingle's attorney says this shows that the serial rapist looks enough like her client that the jogger, Melissa Hellstrom, could have been confused when she identified Tingle as her attacker.

Prosecutors, however, said the rape victim did not think a picture of Tingle in the newspaper looked like her attacker. Further, the victim said she had looked at so many composites that they began to look alike.

After a lengthy closed-door session in Shadrack's chambers



D. KEVIN ELLIOTT/Staff

Steven Tingle, 24, comforts his sister, Laverne Tingle, 28, at the Virginia Beach courthouse Wednesday after their brother, John Tingle, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for attacking a jogger.

## REASONS TO DOUBT?

John Tingle's appearance is a close match to victims' description of a serial rapist, and that has raised questions as to whether Tingle was wrongly identified as the man who attacked a Virginia Beach jogger.

Here's why:

**1.** This composite in the Tingle case was shown to a woman who was raped while Tingle was in jail. She said it looked more like her attacker than the composite police drew from her description.



**2.** This composite of a possible serial rapist was released by police in connection with five rapes near the Oceanfront.



Tingle's attorney said if jurors had been shown the two composites together, it might have created a reasonable doubt.

**3.** But prosecutors say that Tingle's victim clearly identified him as her attacker and that when this picture of Tingle appeared in the newspaper, none of the Oceanfront rape victims noticed a similarity to her attacker.

