

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Young Man Sentenced To Six Months In Prison For Armed Robberies That Occurred In 2013

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ST. THOMAS -- A young man was handed a six-month prison sentence Tuesday for his role in an armed robbery at Raad Grocery in Savan three years ago.

Tyrone Halliday, 20, who faced nine counts in relation to the June 1, 2013 incident, accepted a plea agreement proffered by Attorney General Claude Earl Walker and pleaded guilty to grand larceny.

Almost a year later, on Jan. 17, 2014, Halliday was again arrested and charged with several crimes stemming from a robbery at Barbel Plaza. A schoolboy identified Halliday as the person who stripped him of his jewelry and his mobile phone.

In exchange for the guilty plea, AG Walker recommended that the January 2014 case be dismissed and that Halliday be sentenced to a term of eight years' imprisonment.

Assistant Attorney General Eugene James Connor, Jr., urged V.I. Superior Court Judge James Carroll III to uphold the terms of the plea bargain.

"This plea was for two cases," Connor said. "Both were violent crimes that's why we're recommending eight years."

Public defender, Melanie Turnbull, vehemently opposed the prosecution's recommendation of eight years' incarceration and proposed that her client receives 3711C treatment as he has been rehabilitated.

"What 3711C does is set the reset button on his life. He was 18 years old. To send him to BOC would undo everything he's done for the past two years," Turnbull said.

Title 5 V.I.C. 3711C provides, in part, for offenders who have been convicted of or pleaded guilty to offenses that "did not result in the personal injury or death of any person and where no deadly weapon was used in perpetrating the crime, the court may...defer further and place the defendant on probation upon such terms and conditions as it may require, provided, the accused has never been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony in this jurisdiction or under the laws of the United States, any state or territory thereof, or foreign jurisdiction. Upon fulfillment of the terms of probation the defendant shall be discharged without court adjudication of guilt, and an order shall be entered expunging the finding..."

The court also heard the testimonies of three character witnesses who each described Halliday as "helpful, hardworking, caring and honest" and asked Judge Carroll to exercise leniency and mercy in his sentencing.

Halliday also took the opportunity to address the court on his own behalf. "I take this time to apologize from the core of my heart," he said. "I am genuinely sorry for what took place. I messed up; I've changed. As a man, I take full responsibility."

In meting out his punishment of a bifurcated sentence, Judge Carroll characterized Halliday's actions as "totally reprehensible and totally gratuitous."

"On one hand, I want to give you leniency," Judge Carroll said, "but on the other hand, I have to look at the community. These gun crimes are out of control." He then sentenced Halliday to two year's imprisonment with all but six months suspended. Following his release from prison, Halliday will be placed on probation for two years. Judge Carroll also ordered him to pay \$500 probation fee and \$75 in court costs; to continue his education; and to write a letter of apology to Raad Bahnaj, the owner of Raad Grocery. Halliday's sentence also includes his completing 200 hours of community service, part of which will be spent lecturing young people about guns and the dangers of gun crimes.

Following the sentencing, Halliday was immediately remanded into custody and escorted to the Bureau of Corrections.

According to an affidavit filed by Det. Sofia Rachid, Bahnaj told police that at about 6:40 a.m., he was behind the cash register when two gun-toting black males wearing masks

came into the grocery store. Bahnaj stated that one of the black males was short and the other was tall, and that he knew the tall black male as Halliday, whom he knew because he frequented the store and he lived in the area.

At the time, another customer was inside the store and Halliday's accomplice began to beat the customer, while Halliday was on the other side of the cash register pointing a gun at Bahnaj, according to Rachid's affidavit. After the short masked male finished beating the customer, he went behind the counter and he and Halliday ordered Bahnaj to open the cash register, Rachid wrote. Bahnaj opened the cash register and the robbers took cash and Cingular phone cards, then left the store, according to Rachid.