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Rape conviction questioned

Woman had reported other assaults

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Sara Ylen

By Liz Shepard
| Times Herald

A 54-year-old man convicted in 2003 of raping a woman in a store parking lot could get a new trial.

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Michigan Supreme Court justices issued an opinion Tuesday stating several other rape allegations made by the victim were not known by the defense or prosecution at the time of the trial and need to be weighed to determine if they would have affected the outcome of the case.

The Times Herald normally does not identify victims of sexual assault. Sara Ylen was identified as the victim in a series of articles after approaching the newspaper to share her story in 2003. Ylen could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

St. Clair County Prosecutor Mike Wendling said his office is reviewing the Supreme Court's 70-page ruling.

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James Grissom

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The decision reverses prior rulings by the court of appeals and trial court. The evidence of prior rape allegations is now being returned to the trial court to determine if it is sufficient for a new trial.

“The trial court’s determination is to be made and communicated to this court within 60 days of the date of this opinion,” the justices ruled.

James Eugene Grissom was sentenced to 15 to 35 years in prison after Ylen said he raped her in her vehicle in the Fort Gratiot Meijer parking lot May 12, 2001. He was found guilty by a jury of two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

The new evidence, discovered after the trial, is that Ylen told police, family and

friends she had been raped on other occasions by at least nine different people. A police report also was filed when she told people she was kidnapped and raped in California. That allegation came after the May 2001 incident, but before she reported it to police.

Ylen told police two days after the assault that she was attacked; she waited 14 months before telling police she was raped.

“Mr. Grissom should be granted a new trial because this case rested solely on Ms. Ylen’s credibility, and the new evidence that she falsely claimed she was kidnapped and raped in California just a few months after the alleged attack in this case utterly undermines that credibility,” Christine Pagac, Grissom’s appeals lawyer said.

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