

Harold Worley Jr. is acquitted of sex abuse

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A Horry County jury found Harold Worley Jr. not guilty of sexually abusing children, a decision that will allow the former North Myrtle Beach official to "resume his life."

"It's a good day for him," defense attorney Morgan L. Martin said Thursday.

It took the jury a little more than an hour of deliberation after two days of testimony to reach its decision. Worley faced charges of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a minor and unlawful conduct toward a child. The criminal sexual conduct charge carried a penalty of 25 years to life in prison.

Prosecutors with the Attorney General's Office maintained that Worley committed sex abuse

against children. The defense claimed that Worley was playing a game with the children in 2016, there was no sex abuse, and the allegations stemmed from a messy divorce from his ex-wife.

"This is a shot-in-the-dark allegation," Martin said in his closing statement. Martin said the case was brought to trial only because Worley's ex-wife changed her statement to police alleging the crime.

Members of Worley's family let out a loud gasp after the court clerk read out "not guilty" on both counts. After the proceedings, tears and hugs were shared by members as they celebrated the verdict.

"All right, Mr. Worley, you are free to go," Judge Robert Hood told Worley Jr.

Worley's attorneys, Martin and Valerie Giovanoli, spoke after the verdict and Martin said it was a relief because Worley could have faced decades behind bars if he was found guilty.

"I had a good feeling because I thought we had a good case," Martin said.

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