

Rape arrest stuns suspect's family: Detroitier has four young sisters, and 'would never do anything like that,' brother says

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DETROIT -- Maurice **Ross** hung his head and planted his hands in his pockets as he spoke passionately about his older brother, **Desselonger Ross Jr.**, whom police and prosecutors say is responsible for the majority of Detroit school girl rapes that have terrorized the community.

"When we first heard about the rapes, he said it was a shame and he hoped the guy got caught, because he didn't want to see anything like that happen to his little sisters," Maurice **Ross** quoted his brother as saying.

But police say **Ross Jr.**, 27, attacked six Detroit school girls, causing a safety patrol to mobilize and prompting thousands of students to protest when they felt not enough was being done to protect them.

Though **Ross** is behind bars, officials are warning the community not to let down its guard.

"Any young school girl still needs to be careful," said Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Robert Spada. "Every young school girl should still take precautions."

Ross, a security guard, was arraigned Thursday on one charge of first-degree criminal sexual assault in the rape of a 17-year-old Detroit girl on Oct. 14. He is being held without bond.

He was expected to be arraigned today on seven other rape charges. Six of them are for the rapes of girls attending Denby, Finney and Osborn high schools, according to Spada. The seventh is for an attempted rape of a 35-year-old woman who was dropping off her son at Cleveland Middle School on Nov. 30.

"The arrest and arraignment of this suspect culminates many long hours of investigation for hundreds of officers and hopefully will bring some peace and solace for the victims and their families," said Cmdr. Dennis Richardson, head of the Detroit Police Department's major crime division.

"The trauma that these young girls and women have gone through is something that will be with them for the rest of their lives. Hopefully, in time, they will be able to get past these traumatic experiences."

But as **Ross** was being arraigned Thursday, another school girl was raped.

Police were questioning a man suspected of attacking a 14-year-old girl who was walking her younger sister to Lessenger Middle School at 7:30 a.m. near Fielding and Joy Road. The man grabbed the girls and forced them into an alley and raped the 14-year-old. The younger girl was not hurt.

But police don't believe the suspect, who was expected to be arraigned today, is the one for whom they have developed an FBI profile when eight school girls were raped within a span of weeks.

After police charged Tyson Logan, 28, in November with the rape of a 16-year-old Denby High School student, the FBI helped the department put together two composites of other men who have preyed on Detroit high school girls since school began Sept. 9.

One of the men police are still looking for, is more low-key and not violent with his victims. The other man, identified by police as **Ross**, was profiled as using violence with his victims. Police say **Ross** punched his victims in the face when assaulting them.

Wearing a two-piece green jail uniform, **Ross** apologized Thursday afternoon to his victims as he was led away in handcuffs from the Detroit Police Department to the 36th District Court for arraignment.

"I'm sorry," **Ross** said "I apologize."

Ross was arrested Tuesday night as he left his brother's house on Flanders near Gratiot. Police had arrested him the previous Friday on suspicions that he was stalking young school girls in his east side neighborhood. He was released but rearrested Tuesday when a DNA test in the case linked him to three of the school girl rapes.

Prosecutors say four other school girls that were raped identified him as the suspect in a police line-up.

He also has a police record dating to age 16 that includes charges of assault and battery, felonious assault and malicious destruction of property.

But Maurice **Ross** finds it hard to believe that his brother would attack young girls and women. The Rosses have younger sisters, ages 13, 11, 8 and 5.

"He has a lady friend and he was just saying how he wanted to settle down and have a child," Maurice **Ross** said. "We have little sisters. He would never do anything like that."

Maurice **Ross**, a 26-year-old father of four, said the charges against his brother have traumatized his family.

"My mom said she woke up and just hoped that the whole thing was a dream," Maurice **Ross** said. "It just hurts to have your family name involved in something like this."

Desselonger Ross grew up as the eldest son of Arna and **Desselonger Ross Sr.** in a family of eight children -- four boys and four girls. Maurice **Ross** said his brother graduated from Kettering High School in 1990 and has held various odd jobs and temporary jobs over the years.

Maurice **Ross** also said his brother had recently become more spiritual and found God.

Women in the neighborhood where **Desselonger Ross Jr.** was arrested said the recent school girl attacks have made them even more uneasy.

"To be out here during the day is bad and it's worse at night," said 21-year-old Veronica Gilbert, who is seven months pregnant. "It's a shame that we have so many abandoned houses around here but I don't know how to call about it."

Gilbert said she constantly peeks over her shoulder when walking in her neighborhood.

"I'm afraid to stay by myself," Gilbert said as she made her way to a fast food restaurant on Flanders and Gratiot this week. "Somebody recently broke into my house so I'm staying with someone else."

At Denby High School, where one of **Ross**' sister attended, students and parents said they felt relieved that a man was being held in the string of rapes. But they weren't going to let down their guard just yet.

"Just because they arrested someone doesn't mean there's not more of them out there," said Danielle Inner, a sophomore.

Sheena Epps, another sophomore, agreed, saying she knows that more than two men are responsible for all the rapes.

She also said she fears that police patrols will taper off so she knows what she'll have to do to feel safe.

"Don't let your guard down," Epps said. "Anybody can be attacked in any way." Where to get help * Detroit Police Rape Counseling Center: (313) 833-1660. * My Sister's Place, Detroit. Phone: (313) 961-5528 * Interim House, Detroit. The 24-hour crisis line is (313) 861-5300. * Wayne County's First Step: (734) 459-5900. Safety tips

As part of his response to nine rapes of students since September, Mayor Dennis Archer seeks help from more adults. He suggests these actions by residents and commuters: * Turn on porch lights before dawn on weekdays. * Glance out house windows between 7-9 a.m. and 2-4 p.m. * Get off the freeway and use surface streets to reach work. * If you see suspicious activity, blow your horn, yell out the window or call police.

* Parents should form walking groups of neighboring pupils. * Companies with fleets can ask delivery or cab drivers to cruise along school routes during their rounds, ideally with headlights and emergency flashers on. How to volunteer

Detroit Public Schools is still seeking volunteers for its Safe Streets program. Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer -- and help ensure that children safely walk to or from school -- should call (313) 578-9940 or (313) 578-9941 anytime.

Include your name, driver's license number and Social Security number on the message.

Caption: Photo 1: **Desselonger Ross** Jr. Photo 2: Chanell Lyons, left, and Tailine Green, both students at Denby High, say school girls should continue to be on guard despite the arrest of a Detroiter in a string of rapes. Morris Richardson II / The Detroit News Photo 3: Maurice **Ross** finds it hard to believe that his brother, **Desselonger Ross** Jr., would attack young girls. Morris Richardson II / Detroit News

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