

SUSPECT CHARGED IN SERIES OF RAPES - MAN MIGHT FACE 4 MORE COUNTS

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A serial rape suspect arraigned Monday in Harper Woods in connection with attacks on three women was expected to be charged today in four more sexual assaults.

Dennis Whitsett, 30, of Harper Woods was charged with five counts of criminal sexual conduct. He is suspected of luring a 15-year-old girl into his car at a Detroit gas station and raping her at his Harper Woods home Wednesday. He also was charged in two other cases.

In one case, he was charged with two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct in an attack on an 18-year-old woman on Feb. 2.

In the other case, he was charged with two counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, one count of kidnapping, and one count of criminal sexual conduct with intent to commit sexual penetration in an attack on July 20.

He was supposed to be arraigned over the weekend, but he ended up in the midst of a jurisdictional dispute.

Whitsett, who was convicted in a 1995 carjacking case, also was charged as a repeat offender in the July 20 attack and in Wednesday's attack. If convicted, he could be sentenced to life in prison.

He was taken to Wayne County Jail after being denied bond by Judge Roger J. La Rose.

Although **Whitsett**'s preliminary examination is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Aug. 8, he'll likely be back in court earlier. Four more warrants are expected to be granted today naming him in other criminal sexual assaults - three stemming from Detroit cases and one from a Harper Woods case.

Whitsett was supposed to be arraigned last weekend at 36th District Court in Detroit in the attack on the 15-year-old girl, but instead his case became the focus of a dispute between 36th District Court Magistrate Robert Costello and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Costello declined to sign a warrant for **Whitsett**'s arrest and refused Saturday and Sunday to arraign him, citing jurisdictional problems because the alleged attack occurred in Harper Woods.

The prosecutor's office disagreed, saying that the alleged crime began in Detroit but ended in a home just over the border in Harper Woods. Its argument was bolstered with the mention of a 1927 state law that grants jurisdiction if the crime occurs on the boundary of two communities.

Marylin Atkins, chief judge for 36th District Court, said that Costello made the right call in not signing the warrant request because the law says only judges can sign warrants county-wide.

Magistrates can sign warrants for only their jurisdictions.

She said the request did not mention Detroit.

The problem is unlikely to occur again provided the prosecutor's office gives her notice so she can tell her magistrates, Atkins said.

"It's obviously an attempt at damage control," said Detroit Police Lt. Charles Flanagan.

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: **Dennis Whitsett** could be sentenced to life in prison if convicted of sexual assaults on women in Detroit and Harper Woods.

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