

# Man, 36, convicted on child molestation charge

A Cole County jury has convicted a Jefferson City man of child molestation for allegedly touching the breasts of a 9-year-old girl last March.

Mark A. Lytle, 36, was found guilty of the felony charge in Cole County Circuit Court on Friday afternoon. Judge Byron Kinder ordered a presentence investigation for Lytle, who is in the Cole County Jail while he awaits sentencing.

The victim testified at the trial that Lytle molested her inside an East Capitol Avenue residence on March 11. However, when the prosecution asked her to identify the man who fondled her, she failed to recognize the defendant, who sat in the courtroom without the beard and mustache he wore at the time of the incident.

"The little girl looked around the room, and she was fooled," Cole County Assistant Prosecutor Bill Tackett later told the jury.

"But she recognized this," he said as he pointed to Lytle's pic-

ture taken when he was arrested.

Tackett alleged that Lytle would molest his daughter's friends when they were invited into his home. The jury of eight women and four men could have found Lytle guilty of a lesser charge of misdemeanor assault but rejected that alternative.

"This conduct is a felony," Tackett told the jurors before they began deliberations. "That's the way the (newspaper) article should read, so guys like the defendant can read it."

Lytle's attorney, public defender Jan King, argued that the victim's memory of the incident was questionable. Of Tackett's closing statements, King said: "There's a certain kind of hysteria that surrounds cases like this, and you've just seen an example of it."

"If they call it hysteria, fine," Tackett retorted moments later. "You've got a very sick human being here who needs to be off the streets before he strikes again."