

FEDERAL JUROR THREATENED FOLLOWING TRIAL

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Byline:

A federal juror in Charleston said she was threatened as she left the courthouse Wednesday, minutes after the jury convicted a man of drug charges.

The woman reportedly called Chief U.S. District Judge Charles Haden about 10 minutes after the alleged incident. The FBI is investigating and will decide within a few days whether to press charges, a second courthouse source confirmed.

The jury on which she served found James Peoples, 26, of Russell Street guilty of intent to sell 78 rocks of crack-cocaine in April.

He will serve at least 10 years in prison because this was his second drug conviction.

Peoples' family and friends filled the hallway after the verdict and made a few angry comments to themselves about the jury as they watched marshals escort jurors to the fourth-floor elevator. Some family members were upset that the jury was all white, one source said. Peoples is black.

Charleston police officer Van Armstrong testified during the two-day trial that he saw Peoples throw something down during a West Side chase, and later found a plastic bag. Both sides said the bag contained crack - \$50 rocks worth about \$800 - but Peoples denied that it was his.

Peoples testified in his own defense, saying he ran because he was on probation and was afraid, Healey said.

The jury deliberated for more than two hours Wednesday.

Peoples returned to Charleston in November from a 41-month prison stay, according to his attorney, Mary Healey. He was arrested April 7.

Peoples would have faced a five- to 40-year sentence for distributing 19 grams of crack-cocaine, but the sentence automatically doubles because of his prior conviction, said Assistant U.S. Attorney **Mike Callaghan**.

He will be sentenced Sept. 19.

Also Wednesday, federal prosecutors filed an information accusing Everett Ballard of rerouting checks meant for Sheppard's Auto Supply Co. of Montgomery. Ballard allegedly rerouted three checks worth \$1,175 from 1985 through 1989.

An information usually indicates that a suspect is cooperating with investigators.