

# Man cleared in boy's injury

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## **He nearly was convicted in 2004, but a mistrial was declared.**

Tulsa County jurors acquitted a man Wednesday of a child-injury charge in a case in which the defendant's wife was convicted by a different jury.

Jurors who reportedly deliberated for less than an hour cleared Ernest Jackson of injuring a son who is now 17 years old between 1998 and 2000 at their Tulsa home.

Jackson, who did not testify, "could not stop crying" after the verdict, defense attorney Donald Haslam said.

Haslam said the conduct at issue was actually "lawful, legal and reasonable" discipline.

Prosecutors Dana Kuehn and Becki Murphy maintained that the case was about child abuse -- not discipline.

At a 2004 trial for Jackson in the same case, a different jury deliberated for more than six hours and could not reach the necessary unanimous verdict. That jury's vote was 11-1 in favor of finding Jackson guilty. The hung jury prompted Associate District Judge Caroline Wall to declare a mistrial.

Jackson, 56, has been in the Tulsa Jail since March 2003. He will now be returned to a prison in New Jersey, where he has been convicted of assaulting a different family member.

He and his wife, Kaia Jackson, were convicted in New Jersey on charges for which they evaded capture for 12 years.

They initially were arrested in 1988 in that case, in which a boy, then 8, said his stepfather and mother beat him with switches, electrical cords and hangers at their home.

The defendants fled New Jersey while free on bond.

Investigators said they used the names Butch and Naomi Hill while in Tulsa, and they were arrested here in 2000 after being featured repeatedly on the television program "America's Most Wanted."

Tulsa County prosecutors charged the Jacksons in 2002 with using unreasonable force in whipping and striking a son with a belt and other objects during a two-year period here.

Another Tulsa County jury in 2003 handed Kaia Jackson, now 54, a 35-year prison term upon finding her guilty of the child-injury charge. The state Court of Criminal Appeals affirmed the outcome of that trial.

A New Jersey jury convicted Ernest Jackson in 2002 of aggravated assault and child endangerment, and he was sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Kaia Jackson pleaded guilty to those charges and received a 10-year term.

Haslam asserted Wednesday that Oklahoma officials tried to "orchestrate a conviction" of Ernest Jackson, whom "they saw as vulnerable" because of events in New Jersey.

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