

Since February 7, 2002, the day Mr. John D. Ward received a mandatory life sentence under the mandatory (now advisory) Federal Sentencing Guidelines, Ronald Richards and Associates has kept his appeal alive until the law changed. Unlike numerous other defendants whose attorneys were unaware that there may be a change in the law and who forgot to object to the court making extra verdict findings as to drug quantity, Mr. Ward timely objected on numerous grounds.

The District Court judge in this case eventually filed his own brief with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals claiming that he may not give Mr. Ward life due to the changes in sentencing law. Unfortunately, depending on where you live and who your lawyer is on appeal and was at trial can determine whether you are sent to prison for life or not. Since the Ninth Circuit vacated Mr. Ward's life sentence in April, Mr. Ward was given another chance. The firm also represented his mother pro bono to get her back to Santa Ana and to have counsel appointed. Her sentence was commuted to time served and she is free today.

After a six hour sentencing hearing, Judge Gary Taylor rendered a pretty fair sentence based on the conduct in this case. Mr. Ward will get out of jail in about 12 years after good time credits. He will be out when he is about 46 and still be able to live a productive life. All of us will not have to pay to house and feed him out of our tax dollars. After serving such a long amount of time in prison, he will have been adequately punished. The court also wanted others to be deterred from committing the same crime but questioned whether long sentences deter anyone but the court was compelled to follow the sentencing directives. The government was still seeking a life sentence and US Probation recommended 35 years. The defense was seeking less than 25 years because there was some mandatory minimums that congressionally required substantial custody time.

This was the only life sentence the firm had ever experienced and fortunately, there are no others. The lessons learned by this case is simple: 1. NEVER GIVE UP. 2. DON'T LISTEN TO OTHERS WHO DISCOURAGE YOU FROM RAISING ISSUES THAT ARE NOVEL. 3. OBJECT TO EVERYTHING THAT MAY BE NECESSARY TO ARGUE ON APPEAL LATTER AND GUARD THE RECORD AT ALL COSTS. 4. READ ALL NEW CASES DAILY AND SEEK TRENDS IN THE LAW. The firm would like to thank Laura Jacobs, Esq. and E. Christine Hehir, Esq. for all of their efforts in the trial and appeal. Here is the short blurb as the hearing ended late in the day.

Drug lord gets lesser sentence

The head of Orange County's largest known methamphetamine ring was sentenced Monday to 23 years in prison - reduced from his previous punishment of life behind bars, Assistant U.S. Attorney Carmen Luege said.

John Ward, 34, of Orange was sentenced to life in prison in 2002 for running a \$2million-a-week operation. Recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings dismantled the mandatory sentencing guidelines that yielded his term. A federal appeals court threw out his life sentence in April. Ward's case is one of thousands affected by downgrading mandatory sentencing rules to advisory guidelines.

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