

Tim Long won't go to prison for money laundering

By Chris Ison
Staff Writer

A federal judge decided Thursday that Timothy Long, convicted of laundering drug money through his family's car dealerships, will not go to prison, but he imposed significant prison sentences on three co-defendants involved in the same money-laundering scheme.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Harry MacLaughlin brought tears of relief to members of the well-known St. Paul family, which has disputed the money-laundering charges for nearly a year. But it sparked an angry response from antidrug activists who had monitored the case and advocated tough sentences.

Federal authorities had cast the Long dealerships — which have since been sold — as central to a money-laundering enterprise involving drug trafficker Ralph (Plukey) Duke and others. They charged Long, his brother Rick Long and cousin James Long with conspiracy to launder drug money.

But Rick and James Long were acquitted last June, and although Tim Long had been convicted on two counts, MacLaughlin determined yesterday that he shouldn't go to prison because of health problems related to a head injury he suffered in 1989.

Instead, Long, 27, will be confined to his home for a year and subject to electronic monitoring to ensure he stays there. He can leave only for medical or religious reasons, and must pay a \$100,000 fine and provide 300 hours of community service. He will serve five years of pro-

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bation.

The other three men convicted in the trial will serve sentences of 37 to 52 months.

Twin Cities antidrug activists were outraged by the decision yesterday, charging that the criminal justice system gently treats a white person with money and influence, but harshly punishes street dealers, many of whom are black or poor.

The Longs received an outpouring of support from community leaders. MacLaughlin received letters urging leniency for Tim Long from former St. Paul Mayor George Latimer, former Attorney General Warren Spannaus, Deputy St. Paul Police Chief John Sturner and others.

"Today was one of the tests to see if laws are color blind and class blind," said Rep. Richard Jefferson, DFL-Minneapolis, who attended the sentencing. "And the decision here today indicates that's not necessarily the case."

Family members of one of the other defendants — all of whom are white — also appeared disturbed by Long's sentence. Relatives of Gerald Bell, who moments before had received a 37-month sentence, shook their heads and laughed sarcastically when Tim Long's sentence was announced.

Bell, 63, who owned West Auto Brokers in St. Paul, had been convicted on three of four money-laundering counts. Stephen J. Goethke, 33, formerly finance and insurance manager at the former Long Cadillac dealership in Roseville, was sentenced to 37 months. He had been convicted on three counts.

Terrence Graham, 50, former used-car sales manager and finance and insurance manager for Long Imports in St. Paul, received the stiffest sentence, 52 months. He was convicted on seven counts, and MacLaughlin called him the "most heavily involved" in the conspiracy.

The men were accused of conspiring to help drug dealers launder their money by selling them luxury cars for cash and doctoring credit applications and other records to hide the fact that the buyers' main line of work was drug trafficking. It was the first case of its kind in Minnesota, using relatively new federal laws aimed at white-collar accomplices who may not deal drugs, but who help the dealers "clean" their drug profits.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nate Petterson had pushed for a sentence for Tim Long within the federal guidelines, 46 to 57 months in prison. He said later that he believes the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, Minn., could adequately deal with Long's health problems.

During yesterday's hearing, Petterson urged MacLaughlin to consider the fact that Long's behavior during the trial and his several hours of testimony did not suggest that his disability was serious enough to warrant deviating from federal sentencing guidelines. He also noted that Long's family considered him competent enough to be in charge of the family business when brother Rick Long and father Dick Long were away.

Still, Petterson said that he believes it was "a difficult decision by the judge" and that MacLaughlin made it based solely on the medical evidence.

"This has not been an easy matter for this court to decide," MacLaughlin said as he announced the sentence. But he said that a prison sentence "could be the equivalent of a death sentence for Mr. Long."

He said he didn't make his decision based on the letters of reference. And he noted that federal sentencing guidelines allow for flexibility if a defendant has health problems that could put him at risk in prison. Several doctors wrote reports and testified that Long would be at risk in prison. He was struck in the head by a falling light pole in 1989 and has suffered from migraine headaches, seizures, vision loss, lack of concentration and emotional problems since then, they said.

The Long family and most of the defendants left the courtroom without talking to reporters. But others in the courtroom were quick to attack the sentence.

"When you have the money to hire

doctors to testify for you, you see the results," said Matthew L. Ramadan, executive director of Northside Residents Redevelopment Council in Minneapolis and a member of a group called African American Men Against Narcotics. "Most of the people (in prison) are vulnerable. There are no departures (from sentencing guidelines) for poor people of color. The message is that justice is still unequal."

But attorney Peter Thompson said most people in prison wouldn't be as vulnerable as his client. "I've represented a lot of poor people," he said. "No client I've ever had ever went to prison with the kind of brain injury Tim Long has."