

Sentencing postponed for 13-year-old Michigan youth convicted of murder

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8 December 1999

Sentencing for Nathaniel Abraham, the 13-year-old Michigan boy convicted of murder last month, has been postponed until January 13. On Monday Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Moore granted motions to delay the sentencing hearing, originally scheduled for December 14, in order to give psychologists for the defense and prosecution additional time to complete their evaluations of Nathaniel.

Nathaniel was convicted November 16 on second-degree murder charges for the October 1997 death of 18-year-old Ronnie Greene Jr. in Pontiac. Nathaniel, then 11, was arrested and charged as an adult under a 1997 Michigan law that sets no minimum age for the prosecution of juveniles as adults for serious and violent offenses.

During the three-week trial the prosecution, which was seeking first-degree murder charges, portrayed Nathaniel as a dangerous killer who had to be tried as an adult to protect his neighbors and society as a whole. Defense attorneys undermined these claims, demonstrating that Nathaniel, an emotionally and mentally impaired boy functioning at the level of a child half his age, had been playing with a gun and shooting at trees, and that Greene most likely was struck by a ricocheting bullet.

The judge could sentence Nathaniel as a juvenile, in which case he could be released at the age of 21 or before, or as an adult, which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment with the possibility of parole. The judge could also render a “blended” sentence, whereby he could be held in a juvenile facility until he reached the age of 21, at which time he would be evaluated and possibly sent to an adult prison.

William Lansat, one of Nathaniel's attorneys, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the defense was going to argue that Nathaniel be treated strictly as a juvenile so

that he can be helped and returned to society. The defense's psychologist “is going to tell the judge that Nathaniel needs treatment and other assistance, not incarceration,” he said.

The prosecution, on the other hand, is expected to seek a “blended” sentence, which means Nathaniel could be thrown into adult prison after the age of 21, particularly if he has any disciplinary problems while in juvenile detention. Daniel Bagdade, another defense attorney, told the *WSWS* that a blended sentence would be a “Damocles sword hanging over Nathaniel's head.” If Nathaniel was convicted of another crime, such as assault, resulting from a fight with other juvenile inmates, his sentence would be reverted to adult punishment for second-degree murder, and he could spend the rest of his life in jail.

After the case received widespread publicity and Oakland County authorities drew criticism for trying a child as an adult, prosecutors began to hypocritically claim that they wanted to “do what is best for Nathaniel.” In reality, they have persecuted this troubled child in order to legitimize the state's reactionary new juvenile justice law and the law-and-order politics that stand behind it.

Bagdade, who visits Nathaniel regularly, said, “He is doing as well as can be expected. He has been at Children's Village [where he is detained] and in the court process for two years. He can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel, at least with this process. Nate is very anxious to have the sentencing.”

Meanwhile, the defense is preparing motions for a new trial, or to have the judge set aside the jury verdict on legal grounds.



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