

12-year-old Michigan girl charged with attempted robbery needed cash for family's mortgage

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21 April 2011

An event last Friday night in Highland, Michigan—a quiet, semi-rural community 35 miles northwest of Detroit—provides a chilling glimpse of American reality. A 12-year-old girl allegedly walked into a small grocery store armed with a loaded handgun with the aim of getting money to help her mother pay a house mortgage.

The child is in the sixth grade and turned 12 a month ago. When the attempted robbery was first reported, authorities said they would charge her as an adult, but adult charges are not currently being sought. If she had been charged with armed robbery as an adult, she could have faced up to life behind bars.

Employees at the market—who recognized her because she frequently shopped there—overpowered the girl, took away her handgun and held her down until the police arrived. She can be heard sobbing in the background on the 911 emergency call. No one was injured in the incident.

The girl, whose name has not been released, is being held at Oakland County's Children's Village without bond. She was charged with armed robbery during an informal arraignment over the weekend and was ordered jailed without bond, according to Oakland County Sheriff's officials.

She faces a petition hearing April 26. The hearing is the equivalent of a preliminary hearing for adults. She will remain jailed at Children's Village pending the petition hearing.

In addition, she faces charges of stealing a 9mm handgun from a neighbor's house. The neighbor is an elderly man whom her family assisted with grocery shopping and other errands and so had a key to his home.

The girl's father told the media he and his wife are currently going through a terrible divorce. One can only imagine the pressures that may be bearing down on this family.

News reports and blogs on the attempted robbery seek to blame the parents for the child's behavior. A young girl allegedly tries to steal money to prevent losing a place to live, and this is treated primarily as a criminal matter. A family experiences serious difficulties, and not a single authority or official steps in to offer the family any help—either in the way of financial assistance or counseling services.

Highland, Michigan, on the western border of Oakland County is a pleasant area. It is a mix of open farmland, state recreation land and more than 25 lakes. But it is no more immune than any other part of the country to the current economic crisis.

An Internet search on the present state of the housing market near the grocery store the young girl allegedly tried to rob shows dozens of homes in foreclosure. Moreover, many homes in the area show drastic reductions in price as homeowners try to sell them. The majority of homes are “underwater,” that is, because of the drastic drop in value—between 20 and 35 percent—the mortgage owed is greater than the value of the home.

For example, one home near the store is described as a three-bedroom ranch with a deck and a view of the lake, and is selling for \$40,590. In 2006, it sold for \$133,000. Another home with three bedrooms on 1-1/2 acres of land is for sale with an asking price of \$106,000. In 2005, the owners paid \$232,000.

The same week as the incident in Highland, Michigan, the US Senate released a lengthy report

documenting systematic criminal activity on the part of the mortgage lenders and banks, whose practices helped bring about the collapse in housing prices. Not a single senior executive at a major US bank, hedge fund, mortgage firm or insurance company has gone to jail. Not one is being held without bond.



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