

Michigan jury to begin deliberations in trial of Oxford High shooter's mother, Jennifer Crumbley

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The jury in the trial of Jennifer Crumbley on charges of involuntary manslaughter began deliberations on Friday following closing arguments by the prosecution and defense in Pontiac, Michigan.

Jennifer is the mother of Ethan Crumbley, the student who killed four of his classmates and injured seven others, including a teacher, in a shooting rampage in between classes at Oxford High School on November 30, 2021.

The trial of Jennifer Crumbley, 45, opened on January 25 and included testimony by 21 witnesses brought by Oakland County prosecutors. The witnesses provided details of the shooting as well as the circumstances that led Ethan Crumbley, who was 15 at the time, to carry out the crime.

Attempting to convince the 17-person jury that the mother of the shooter should be held criminally responsible for the killings, Assistant Prosecutor Mark Keast sought to paint a picture of a parent who was aloof, uncaring and disinterested in the problems faced by her son.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has maintained throughout the case, the criminal prosecution of Ethan Crumbley's parents by Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald, a Democrat, is politically motivated and sets a dangerous and reactionary precedent. The undemocratic character of the case is underscored by a glaring contradiction: The shooter, who pleaded guilty, was tried as an adult in order to give him the severest possible sentence—life in prison without the possibility of parole. Yet his parents are being criminally prosecuted for involuntary manslaughter for allegedly failing to alert the school authorities of their son's disturbed and dangerous mental and emotional

condition.

McDonald, and the media, are placing exclusive blame on Jennifer and James Crumbley for the horrifying crime committed by their son in order to cover up the deeper causes within society for this and other school shootings across the country.

Text messages from months before the shooting, in which the adolescent told his mother about his fears that their house was haunted by demons, were presented by the prosecution and read out to the jury by a forensic investigator. The prosecution maintained that Jennifer Crumbley never responded to these messages.

The prosecution also presented text messages between Jennifer and her husband James Crumbley, Ethan's father, as well as messages between Jennifer and other adults. The prosecution claimed that these messages showed the parents were more interested in their two horses, which were boarded at a local horse farm, than the deteriorating condition of their son.

The prosecution also attempted to undermine Jennifer's credibility by referring to an extramarital affair she was having and the fact that she and her husband frequented bars in nearby Lake Orion Township. The prosecution pointed further to the fact that the Crumbleys bought their son the gun he used in the shootings as a Christmas present.

McDonald also called Oxford High School officials to the stand. On the day of the shooting, Ethan had been taken to the school office, and his parents had been called in for a counseling session after Ethan was found to be researching ammunition online and watching violent videos of shootings.

Ethan had also sketched on a geometry paper a gun, a bullet and a person who had been shot. The sketch

included the words, “The thoughts won’t stop. Help me,” “Blood is everywhere,” “The world is dead,” and “My life is useless.”

In the brief meeting, both the school officials and the parents decided that Ethan should remain in school since he had no prior record of behavior problems. No one asked if he had access to a weapon, and neither the parents nor the school counselor suggested that his backpack be searched.

Defense lawyer Shannon Smith called only Jennifer Crumbley to the stand for questioning and the defendant testified on Thursday and Friday. The defense pointed out that the text messages provided by the prosecution were cherry-picked to conform to its narrative. When asked about the communications with Ethan regarding their house being haunted, the mother explained that Ethan had always joked with them about this and maintained that the messages that were being quoted were taken out of context.

Jennifer said that the family had played with a Ouija board in the basement and Ethan was “always sarcastic” and “always messing around with us.” On the issue of the gun, Jennifer denied responsibility for the fact that the weapon had not been adequately secured in their house, saying that her husband was responsible for the gun. James Crumbley, 47, is scheduled for a separate trial on the same charges in March.

In her testimony, Jennifer defended her parenting of Ethan, saying she did not feel like a failure. She said her son never asked for mental health care before he carried out his shooting rampage, even though the prosecution produced diary entries by Ethan in which he said his parents refused to help him with his problems. Jennifer said she had never seen the diary.

She did say her son was anxious at times about schoolwork and had expressed concerns about his future. She said she regretted his carrying out the shootings, but that in retrospect she would not have changed her parenting decisions. The defense presented photos of the family doing things together such as camping out, vacationing and playing games together.

In her closing argument, prosecutor McDonald acknowledged that the case was rare, but insisted that Jennifer Crumbley had enabled the shootings by doing “the unthinkable, and because of that, four kids have died.”

Attorney Smith said her client should not be punished for bloodshed that her son set in motion, mainly because Jennifer Crumbley could not have foreseen what her son was going to do. Smith said Jennifer was a “hyper-vigilant” parent, and argued that Ethan was not mentally ill, but a “master manipulator.”

Smith also told the jury: “This case is a very dangerous one for parents out there. It just is. And it is one of the first of its kind.”

She continued, “I am asking that you find Jennifer Crumbley not guilty. Not just for Jennifer Crumbley, but for every mother who’s out there doing the best they can, who could easily be in her shoes.”

A conviction of the Crumbley parents would certainly set a precedent of holding parents responsible for the actions of their children in the growing number of deadly episodes of gun violence in schools across the US. As pointed out by Detroit-based attorney George Donnini, who spoke to *The Detroit News*, this case is about what was not done, rather than what was done.

Donnini said, “The criminal justice system usually punishes you for your actions—for doing something wrong. Here, it’s for the defendant not doing something, and that’s where the tension lies in this case. Prosecutors are saying she should’ve done more as a parent; the fact that she failed to do something is what is getting her in trouble, and that’s why this is a unique trial.”

Judge Cheryl A. Matthews told the jurors that she would give them their instructions when they return to the court room on Monday morning to begin deliberations.



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