

Jennifer and James Crumbley sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison for Oxford High School shooting

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Jennifer and James Crumbley, the parents of Michigan high school student Ethan Crumbley, who killed four of his classmates and injured seven others on November 30, 2021, were each sentenced to 10 to 15 years in prison on Tuesday.

The prosecution, conviction and sentencing of Jennifer, 45, and James Crumbley, 47, concludes the first case in the US in which parents have been held criminally responsible for a mass shooting carried out by their child. Ethan Crumbley, who was charged as an adult with 24 counts, including first-degree murder, pled guilty on October 22, 2022 and, more than a year later, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The parents of Ethan Crumbley, who was 15 years old when he carried out a shooting spree between classes at Oxford High School, were convicted of involuntary manslaughter in separate jury trials earlier this year. All three Crumbleys are eligible to appeal their convictions.

While it is true that the Crumbleys were negligent and morally culpable for the crime committed by their son, Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald seized upon the evidence against the parents to bring a case against them that establishes a dangerous and reactionary legal precedent.

The case opens the door to criminally prosecuting parents for what is fundamentally an expanding and horrendous social crisis of mass school shootings carried out by children. The Crumbleys have now been convicted and sentenced to long prison terms for failing to stop the murders carried out by their son.

The Crumbleys were given the opportunity to speak before their sentences were imposed by Judge

Matthews. Both expressed remorse for what their son had done but refused to admit that they were responsible for the crimes he committed.

Jennifer Crumbley, who had asked the court before the hearing to impose a sentence of house arrest instead of prison time, addressed the families of the victims. She said, “I stand today not to ask for your forgiveness, as I know it may be beyond reach, but to express my sincerest apologies for the pain that has been caused.”

James Crumbley, who asked before the hearing for the court to impose a sentence of time served in jail, said to the families, “I cannot express how much I wish that I had known what was going on with him or what was going to happen, because I absolutely would have done a lot of things differently.”

The family members of the victims also spoke before the sentencing about the impact on their lives of the horrific deaths of the high school students at the hands of the shooter. They condemned the inaction of the Crumbley parents, who they said could have prevented the shooting from taking place.

The evidence presented during both jury trials showed that the Crumbley parents acted recklessly in regard to the murder weapon and were unresponsive to indications that their son was suffering from mental and emotional distress.

Ethan Crumbley murdered Madisyn Baldwin, age 17, Tate Myre, age 16, Hana St. Juliana, age 14, and Justin Shilling, age 17, with a 9mm SIG Sauer semi-automatic pistol which James Crumbley had bought for him as an early Christmas present. Even though he purchased a cable lock for the gun, James never used it to secure the weapon in the household.

Four days before the school shooting, Jennifer took

her son to a firing range to use the weapon and then boasted about it on her Instagram account. During testimony, Jennifer was asked why the gun had not been secured in the house, and she said that this was her husband's responsibility.

On the day of the shooting, Ethan's parents had been called to a conference at Oxford High School and presented with a violent sketch that Ethan had made which depicted a gun and a shooting victim with the words, "The thoughts won't stop Help me," "The world is dead" and "My life is useless."

The parents declined to take Ethan home with them that morning and said nothing during the meeting about the gun to which their son had access. They did not request that his backpack be searched by high school staff and left the meeting to go back to work.

When the parents were asked about the mental health issues facing their son, including evidence in his text messages that he was hallucinating and experiencing extreme paranoia, they said they had no idea that he was having psychological problems, and, in one instance, Jennifer said Ethan was joking with her when he said he was seeing things.

Before handing down the sentence, Judge Cheryl Matthews of the Oakland County Circuit Court in Pontiac, Michigan, said, "Parents are not expected to be psychic. But these convictions are not about poor parenting. These convictions confirm repeated acts or lack of acts that could have halted an oncoming runaway train—repeatedly ignoring things that would make a reasonable person feel the hair on the back of her neck stand up."

Speaking before the sentencing, the Democratic Party Prosecutor Karen McDonald did not address the broader implications of the Crumbley case but engaged in grandstanding, saying, "These were tragic and awful deaths, what these families have gone through. And it is preventable. It is preventable—that is my message."

Later in the day, during an interview with National Public Radio, McDonald tried to minimize the significance of the case, claiming she "didn't even contemplate" that the criminal prosecution and conviction was the first case of its kind in US history.

McDonald then said, "I don't like to hear the commentary that suggests that it's opening the door to criminalizing bad parenting or could be used in a disparate way." She then added, "I would never stand

for the proposition that we should be held accountable for what our kids do and that's just simply not what the case was about."

However, as Ekow Yankah, a professor at the University of Michigan Law School, told the *New York Times*, the effect of the ruling on Tuesday would be felt beyond the state. He said:

This is going to be a precedent, most obviously in Michigan and its home jurisdiction, but prosecutors all over the country will see this as a new and viable form of liability. I think we should not underestimate the precedential power of this case, even as we recognize that the facts were quite extraordinary.



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