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## Crime

Police blotters and scanners, crime stats and more

### **Romell Broom, East Cleveland teenager's convicted killer, asks Ohio Parole Board to spare him from death sentence**

by [Reginald Fields/Plain Dealer Bureau Chief](#)

Thursday August 20, 2009, 6:05 PM

COLUMBUS -- Bessye Middleton has waited 25 years to see her daughter's killer put to death. On Thursday, she urged the Ohio Parole Board to get on with it.

"It's time for him to go. That's all I got to say," said Middleton, of East Cleveland, during a clemency hearing for death row inmate Romell Broom. "He's got to go."

But Broom's attorneys argued their client didn't get a fair trial in 1985 -- the year after 14-year-old Tryna Middleton was abducted at knifepoint, sexually assaulted and stabbed to death -- because East Cleveland police shielded records that may have changed the outcome of the case.

They asked the board to recommend that the governor allow Broom, 54, to escape his Sept. 15 execution and have more time to argue his case.

"If he would have gotten a fair trial in 1984 we wouldn't be here today," said Broom's attorney Tim Sweeney. "If he was not acquitted, certainly he would not be on death row."

This is the second time Broom's case has ticked toward the 11th hour. He had been scheduled to die in October 2007, but he joined an inmate lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Ohio's lethal injection method and won a stay of execution. That challenge has since been dismissed.

Broom's lawyers are waging a careful defense by questioning the lifestyle of the victim and her friends but trying not to be insensitive about the girl's tragic death.

Police records indicated that Middleton and two other teenage girls she was walking with at dark from a high school football game had been drinking beer and smoking marijuana. They were also thought to be sexually active and known to jump in cars with strangers, according to records.

Those two friends, Bonita Collier and Tammie Sims, said that Broom also grabbed them that night, Sept. 21, 1984, shortly before midnight. They fought him off while Tryna was dragged away. Tryna's body was found a few hours later in a nearby abandoned parking lot.

Broom, who had previously served time for raping a 12-year-old girl, was convicted of the abduction, rape and murder largely based on the testimony of the two other girls.

In July, the 8th Ohio District Court of Appeals said that the suppressed police records can be presented to the trial court for a possible new trial for Broom. His attorneys have to convince Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court that the records probably would have changed the outcome of his case.

But it is unclear whether Broom's attorneys will get a chance to make that argument before his execution.

Matthew Myers, an assistant county prosecutor, told the parole board that he does not believe the records would have changed Broom's conviction or punishment.

"I think it is an outrage to blame the victim at this point," Myers told the board. "I think it is a desperate attempt to avoid the inevitable."

Bessye Middleton also chided Broom's legal team.

"If you had a daughter, would you want me to belittle her as you have my daughter?" Middleton turned to ask Broom attorney Adele Shank. "I know you are an attorney and you have a job to do, but I do not appreciate it."

Shank, while later addressing the board, turned to Middleton to apologize for making her feel "like we're picking on Tryna, because that's not our goal here."

The parole board will make a recommendation to Gov. Ted Strickland next Friday on Broom's clemency request. Strickland does not have to follow the recommendation.



August 20, 2009

## Hamilton Co. courts refuse budget cuts

By Jessica Brown  
jlbrown@enquirer.com

The municipal and common pleas courts in Hamilton County - which handle virtually all criminal cases in Hamilton County from speeding tickets to murder cases - are refusing to make any budget cuts next year.

They say if the county forces further budget cuts, the courts will close down.

"We're telling them what our budget is and if next year there is no money I guess these courts would not remain open," said Michael Walton, administrator for the municipal court and common pleas court. He sent a letter to county commissioners and the county administrator Wednesday on the issue.

• <http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2009/08/20/mikewaltonletter.pdf> target="\_new">Read Mike Walton's letter

The county administration, bracing for continued declines in revenue next year asked departments to make even deeper cuts in 2010 than they did this year.

Estimates put the 2010 general fund budget at about \$209.3 million. That's \$30 million less than the approved 2009 budget and \$17 million less than the current 2009 budget after mid-year reductions.

Walton oversees the common pleas court, court reporters, municipal court and probation. The county set a 2010 budget goal for those departments of \$21 million, a 20 percent drop from what was budgeted this year.

If the courts can't make or refuse to make cuts — and legally they're allowed to refuse — the county will have to either fight it out in court or find the roughly \$5 million somewhere else. That could mean more layoffs or service reductions in other departments that have already been hit hard.

The sheriff's office closed its second-largest jail and laid off more than 100 workers. The Job and Family Services Department has seen funding drop by more than 50 percent, resulting in hundreds of layoffs and longer wait-times for people seeking public assistance.

The county coroner is closing his crime lab two days a month to save money. Other County departments across the board have laid off workers and imposed furloughs to make ends meet.

The courts have so far done neither.

Walton suggested the commissioners increase the sales tax.

"It's a pretty stunning approach," said Pepper. "To say we'd rather have a tax increase than make basic changes is really putting your head in the sand about the state of the economy. I don't agree with that and I don't think that's where our citizens are."

Commissioner Todd Portune and Greg Hartmann echoed Pepper's dismay and his opposition of a tax hike.

Walton said the courts already cut about 100 of their 600 jobs through attrition. He said furloughs wouldn't generate anywhere near enough savings and layoffs would cripple the courts' ability to do their jobs.

Public safety, which includes the courts, accounts for about two thirds of the county's general fund spending.

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