



Genesee County Prosecutor's Office

David Leyton, Prosecutor



Lorrie Thomas Receives Maximum Prison Sentence in Death of Her 9-year-old Daughter

FLINT -- Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said that today's sentencing of Lorrie Mae Thomas to the maximum prison term was an appropriate conclusion to the prosecution of a case that had made news around the world for its underlying callousness in the way the victim died and the manner in which her body was disposed.

Thomas, 40 of Flint, was sentenced to 10-15 years in prison after she pleaded no contest in December to involuntary manslaughter and four additional felonies and one misdemeanor related to the death of her 9-year old adopted daughter, Shylae Thomas, who was a quadriplegic. Lorrie Thomas' plea was accepted by the court based on findings in the autopsy report and testimony from the preliminary examination that showed Shylae had suffered from severe neglect which resulted in chronic malnutrition. Her body was later found by police in a plastic bin in a storage unit.

Lorrie Thomas is the sister of Shylae's biological mother and she adopted Shylae as a toddler. Due to Shylae's mental and physical disabilities, which included the need to be fed through an attached feeding tube, she was totally dependent upon the care of Thomas and other members of her household.

The police investigation began Tuesday, April 21, 2009 when they were contacted by the Michigan Department of Human Services who had received a report that same day of a missing child. When police responded to the scene of the report, they discovered that Shylae Thomas was not present and a story of her whereabouts was given by her adopted mother, Lorrie Thomas.

Later that evening, in the early morning hours of April 22nd, the police investigation led to the Stor & Lock Storage Facility on N. Saginaw Rd. in Vienna Twp., north of Flint where the police found the body of Shylae wrapped in a black garbage bag which was stuffed into a plastic bin and kept inside a storage unit. Mothballs were placed on top of the garbage bag in an apparent attempt to mask the odors of the dead body.

Lorrie Thomas was sentenced as follows:

- Count 1: Involuntary Manslaughter
Sentenced to 10-15 years in prison
- Count 2: Child Abuse – Second Degree
Sentenced to 32-48 months in prison
- Count 3: Tampering with Evidence in a Criminal Case Punishable By More Than 10 Years in Prison
Sentenced to 32-48 months in prison
- Count 4: Fraud – Welfare – Over \$500
Sentenced to 32-48 months in prison
- Count 5: Fraud – Welfare (Failure to Inform) - \$500 or More
Sentenced to 32-48 months in prison
- Count 6: Dead Bodies – Removing Without Medical Examiner Permission
Sentenced to 365 days in the county jail

Thomas was given credit for 266 days already served in jail and also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$11,538.92.

Prosecutor Leyton commented that Thomas' words at sentence rang hollow based on her actions following the death of Shylae.

"She hid the body in a storage unit and she continued to cash welfare checks intended for the benefit of Shylae even though she had already died," Prosecutor Leyton said.

Prosecutor Leyton also advised that "one of the important lessons to be learned from this tragic situation is that if you, as a parent or guardian, cannot meet the most basic needs of your children, then contact authorities or social service providers for assistance. There is help out there."

"The tragic story of Shylae should never have occurred and it did not need to occur," he said.

Prosecutor Leyton commended the work of his staff and members of the Flint City Police and Genesee County Sheriff's Department for their quick response at the outset and their tireless and determined efforts from beginning to end on this case.

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