

The Salinas **Californian**

Former Hartnell College student sentenced in younger brother's death

The Salinas Californian - Salinas, Calif.

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Date: Apr 15, 2010

Start Page: n/a

Section: NEWS

Text Word Count: 645

Document Text

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A former Hartnell College student was sentenced to jail and probation time Wednesday for fatally stabbing his younger brother in Salinas, bringing the 2007 case to a close.

Monterey County judge Terrance Duncan ordered Langston Williams III to serve a year in the county's jail and four years of felony probation for the Oct. 24, 2007 death of his 18-year-old sibling Thaddeus Williams.

The killing happened at the Hartnell student-athletes' apartment on the 600 block of Palma Drive, during what authorities described as a quarrel over a laptop computer.

Williams III listened to Duncan's ruling while he clutched a small, orange book titled "Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence."

"I'm not going to send [Williams III] to prison," the judge said.

The maximum term Williams III faced after pleading no contest to involuntary manslaughter in September was five years in prison.

As in the past, his family and friends were present during the hearing. Williams III's father said he's pleased that the judge showed his son leniency.

"I'm grateful for everything," Langston Williams Jr. said. "We had the best representation you could possibly have in this situation."

Williams III's lawyers in the case are Salinas attorneys Scott Erdbacher and Thomas Worthington.

Outside the courtroom, Williams Jr. reflected on how the family used to fly to Salinas to attend the two brothers' games. Thaddeus was a football player, while Williams III was on the basketball team.

"It's just amazing how life changes," he said. "Now we go to cemeteries and jail."

Alternative to jail sought

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Worthington said the team plans to seek home confinement for Williams III in lieu of jail time. Dr. Taylor Fithian, on behalf of the defense, told the judge that Williams III has benefited greatly from treatment and therapy over the past two and a half years.

Steven Somers, a county deputy district attorney, opposed home detention in court, saying it was unsuitable for violent criminal cases.

"Typically, home detention doesn't apply to violent [crimes]," Somers told the court. "I don't think home detention is suitable. This was a violent act -- the most violent of acts."

Worthington said after the hearing that he is confident the home detention application will be approved due to the extraordinary circumstances of the case. He said a family friend has agreed to open their Salinas home to Williams III if home confinement is granted. It would take at least two weeks before that decision is made, Worthington said.

Williams III initially was charged with murder in the death of his brother. During the struggle over the laptop, authorities have said, Williams III held a steak knife. It is still unclear exactly how the steak knife ended up piercing Thaddeus' heart. Williams III had told investigators he never intended to stab his brother.

Williams III has been living in San Antonio, Texas, with his family between court proceedings. His family managed to post Williams III's bail soon after the case began in 2007.

'Worst possible hell'

During the hearing, Worthington told the judge that he appreciates everyone's patience and fairness in the long, drawn-out case.

"I don't remember in my 40 years of experience ... a more tragic case than this one," Worthington said. "Langston Williams has just been through the worst possible hell that anybody could go through. He has been in prison for two years living with what he did."

Williams III is scheduled to surrender to Monterey County Jail on May 19.

During Wednesday's hearing, Worthington told the judge that his client has completed a medical assistant externship and plans to enroll this fall in a four-year college in Texas. Should he be accepted, Worthington said, his lawyers will petition for the remaining jail term to be served in Texas. As part of his terms, Williams III is prohibited from leaving the state unless he has permission from his probation officer.