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Monterey County judge allows Crow to wear street clothes to court -- but shackled

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Author: SUNITA VIJAYAN

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svijayan@thecalifornian.com

A Monterey County judge Wednesday ruled that a Prunedale man accused of murdering his wife can wear street clothing during court appearances.

Before the ruling, Brian Worthington, an attorney for Jesse John Crow, argued that, without proper precautions, elevated media scrutiny in the case could undercut his client's right to a presumption of innocence should the case go to trial.

Crow, 33, was not present during Wednesday's hearing.

Deputy County Counsel Traci Kirkbride, representing the county Sheriff's Office, which oversees the jail, argued it is too early in the proceedings to allow Crow to wear street clothing. Criminal defendants are usually allowed to change out of the orange-and-white uniform during trial proceedings. Kirkbride said there is a burden placed on the sheriff deputies when inmates change clothing, which includes additional searches and separation from other inmates.

"The presumption of innocence ... applies to every single criminal defendant in our system and not just criminal defendants who are 'high profile,'" she said.

While Judge Russell Scott made the ruling to allow Crow to change out of his jail uniform for the hearing, he added that the order may be revisited should the Sheriff's Office encounter problems.

Scott denied, however, a request from Crow's attorneys to also remove their client's shackles during court hearings -- citing safety reasons. The order was made generally, Scott said, and the issue may be brought up again on a case-by-case basis.

"Just take a look at the courtroom We're very vulnerable here," the judge said. "The street's just out the door."

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Worthington argued that the shackles contributed to perceptions of guilt and the added media attention on his client could cause Crow psychological hardship.

"We were very happy the judge didn't order [taking off] the restraints," Kirkbride said.

She added that jail officials have been notified to inform her if any problems arises with the clothing issue.

Kirkbride said the last time the court made a similar ruling was in the John Franklin Kenney case in August 2008. The case, which involved a double-murder in Carmel Valley, also drew increased media attention. But the judge allowed Kenney to remain unshackled in street clothing.

Crow was arrested Feb. 16, nearly a month after his wife, Ryann Bunnell Crow, was reported missing. Bunnell Crow, 23, was last seen alive Jan. 30 in Prunedale. Authorities claim Crow killed his wife. The Sheriff's Office, the agency conducting the search for Bunnell Crow, said Wednesday afternoon that her body has not been found.

Crow pleaded not guilty Monday to the murder charge. He remains in county jail, held on \$3 million bail.

what's next

Jesse John Crow, accused of murdering his wife, Ryann Bunnell Crow, is scheduled to appear in court at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday.