

Parents get 8 years each in baby's death

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Falling somewhat short of the state's sentencing guidelines, a Suffolk couple received eight years of active prison time apiece on Monday for the December starvation death of their 11-month-old daughter.

Linwood McKinley Jones Jr. and his wife, Shawntay Demetria Jones, were each sentenced to 25 years in prison, with 18 suspended, for the second-degree murder charges they had faced, as well as five years in prison, with four suspended, for the child abuse charges they faced in connection with the child's death.

Defense attorney Justin Bush, who represented Linwood Jones, called it a "great outcome" for his client, especially considering the volatility and emotional nature of the case. "I'm ecstatic," he said.

Judge Carl Edward Eason Jr. sounded as if he might punish the couple more stiffly as he described being disturbed by the "general lack of remorse" he saw from them in court.

"I'm troubled that they haven't shown the emotions that most parents" would be expected to show in a similar situation, he said.

But in the end, the couple's punishment fell five years short of the state's minimum recommended sentence, which ranged from just over 13 years to nearly 21 years for each defendant.

"We respect the court's decision," said Marie Walls, senior assistant commonwealth's attorney. "Ultimately, Mr. and Mrs. Jones have to bear the responsibility" for what happened to their daughter.

Detectives testified Monday that the Jones' Third Avenue home on was in a state of squalor when they arrived on Dec. 1 to investigate the baby's death.

Detective David Burke described a "cluttered, nasty" interior, where trash, half-eaten food,

dirty diapers, clothes and empty bottles littered the floor. Rolled-up, dirty diapers were found on the kitchen table and on a shelf in a medicine cabinet, along with a toothbrush and toothpaste.

The home lacked water service, as the couple had stopped paying the bill sometime earlier, testimony revealed. There was, however, a 42-inch plasma television, and testimony revealed that the couple had been receiving food stamps from the Department of Social Services.

A high chair that was found near a bedroom had its tray caked in a brown substance, there was feces in the non-functioning toilet, a couch appeared to have vomit stains and the entire home was permeated by "some kind of foul odor" that Burke described as the worst he encountered in 17 years as a police officer.

Rigor mortis already had set in by the time rescue personnel were called to the home, meaning that they were unable even to attempt resuscitation, testimony revealed.

An autopsy determined that the girl had died of malnutrition and severe dehydration. She weighed 17 pounds at the time of her death, and had lost weight since her last doctor's visit, according to Dr. Michelle Clayton, a prosecution witness from Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters.

Clayton testified that the girl's condition indicated a "prolonged period of starvation — weeks, at least."

Witnesses for the defendants described Shawntay Jones as a "doting mother" and her husband as very concerned about his children's welfare.

The couple also has two sons, who have been placed in foster care.

When they submitted an Alford plea to the second-degree murder charge, the parents did not admit guilt, but conceded that the commonwealth had sufficient evidence to convict them of the crimes they were charged with.

As a part of that plea agreement, they will face indefinite supervised probation, parenting classes and visits from social services caseworkers when they are released from prison.