

# Lay insufficient punishment at legislators' feet

By **Staff Report** | Suffolk News-Herald

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There is little doubt the sentence issued upon Linwood McKinley Jones, Jr. and his wife, Shawntay Demetria Jones, for their involvement in the December starvation death of their 11-month-old daughter has drawn much criticism for the leniency showed by the presiding judge.

In issuing a sentence of eight years in prison for both in the case, the judgment fell well short of the state's sentencing guidelines, which called for a minimum of 13 years in jail for both.

Many in the community — including those on the Suffolk News-Herald's Web site — have strongly criticized the judge for “ignoring” the guidelines and enacting his own justice.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We stand by those who would have wished for a stronger sentence for this couple, based on the information shared about the horrific death of this child. But we do not wear a robe and sit behind a bench.

If we are to be upset at anyone, we should be upset with the state lawmakers who make such leniency and judicial discretion possible in such cases.

The sentencing guidelines are just that — guidelines. They are not mandatory, but simply offer a sitting judge a compass of sorts to give them guidance in setting judgments.

In such an emotionally-riddled case, we rely on our judicial system to be emotionless. We hope and pray that the judicial system set up by our founding fathers will remain impartial and simply rule on the facts presented.

We then must rely on and obey the ruling handed down by the courts hearing the case, without prejudice.

The judicial branch of our government is far too vital to the moral fabric of our country for

the rule of law not to apply and the actions of our appointed judges not to be followed.

It is our hope this toddler's life and death will not have happened in vain. It is our hope that our lawmakers will look upon these guidelines and offer stricter rules for such judgments.

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