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### **Austin Man Sentenced to Life in Prison for the Murder of his Stepmother**

A Travis County jury sentenced Pontrey Jones, age 23, Thursday evening to life in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The defendant faced a possible range of punishment from five years to 99 years or life. Wednesday the jury convicted the defendant of first-degree murder after deliberating for a total of three minutes. The jury heard evidence that on December 18, 2016, one week before Christmas, the defendant stabbed his stepmother, 38-year-old Magdalena “Maggie” Ruiz, in the chest with a kitchen knife four times killing her.

The defendant’s father testified that on the night of December 18, 2016, he and the victim had watched the Dallas Cowboys game and, following the game, he fell asleep. The father woke up to find the defendant stabbing the victim in the chest. The father called 911, and the defendant fled the scene. Officers from the Austin Police Department stated they apprehended the defendant a few blocks away from the murder scene and that he had stripped off all of his clothes. Later that night, when interviewed by police, the defendant admitted to stabbing his stepmother in the chest with a knife four times. He confessed that his intent was to kill the victim, and said he did not regret his actions that night.

The defendant’s father explained to the jury that, in the months before the murder, the defendant had been homeless for a short period and that he and his wife, the victim, had been allowing the defendant to stay in their apartment because he had no place else to stay.

During the punishment phase of the trial, the jury heard from a number of witnesses who testified that the defendant had received mental health treatment a number of times throughout his life for his mental illness. This included both inpatient and outpatient treatment that was court ordered by a Travis County juvenile judge. The jury also heard evidence that the defendant threatened his uncle with a knife when he was 15-years-old and was deemed a high-risk inmate at the Travis County Jail due to his aggressive and erratic behavior.

The jury also heard from several doctors, including Dr. Marisa Mauro, who initially found the defendant incompetent. The defendant was sent to the North Texas State Hospital in Vernon, Texas for competency restoration. Following his stay at the state hospital, Dr. Mauro found the defendant competent to stand trial but diagnosed him with schizoaffective disorder. She later found that, at the time of the murder, the defendant knew his conduct was wrong and that he was, therefore, sane. Dr. Lee Carter then testified, on behalf of the state, that due to numerous factors the defendant had a very high rate of risk for future violence. Finally, the jury heard from Dr. Joseph Penn, a psychiatrist and the medical director for mental health services at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, who detailed the level of mental health services the defendant would receive if sent to prison.

The victim's sister, Christina Ruiz, testified that her sister was kind, empathetic, and a beloved member of their very large family. She told the jury that, at the time of the murder, her sister had been concerned about the defendant's increasingly erratic behavior and had planned to help him find his own apartment after the holidays.

Following the sentencing, Ms. Ruiz stated, "Today justice was served for Maggie and our hearts and minds are at peace, knowing he will not hurt anyone ever again. Thank you to the jury for protecting our community and giving us back that peace." Assistant District Attorneys Drew Rountree and Joshua Somers thanked the jurors for their time and careful deliberation. Prosecutor Josh Somers stated, "Maggie was a loving wife, mother, and family member. We are pleased that the jury has brought closure and justice to the family, and we hope the defendant will receive the continuous mental health treatment he needs while in prison."

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