

911 operator gets 1-year probation - She avoids jail for failing to send help to a boy who called to say his mother was dying.

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DETROIT -- Surrounded by supporters, a **911** emergency **operator** believed to be the first **operator** in the nation convicted of neglect of duty escaped jail time Tuesday for failing to send help to a 5-year-old boy who called to say his mother was dying.

Sharon Nichols, 43, thought Robert Turner's call on Feb. 20, 2006, was a prank. But police discovered his mother, Sherill Turner, 46, dead inside her Detroit apartment from an apparent heart attack when a second **911 operator** sent officers to chastise the boy because he called again three hours later.

She faced a year in jail for the misdemeanor, but 36th District Judge Paula G. Humphries on Tuesday said she agreed with a presentence report and prosecutors' recommendations of no time behind bars.

She ordered Nichols to serve one year of **probation** and 15 days or 100 hours of community service and pay \$450 in fines and court costs. The judge also canceled routine drug counseling and testing because there's no evidence of abuse.

"But for this one conviction ... this is your only criminal record and in fact not even a traffic ticket on her record," the judge said. Shortly before the jury found Nichols guilty on Jan. 18, the judge dismissed identical charges against the second **911 operator** to speak with the boy on the day his mother died. Humphries noted that rudeness does not equate to neglect of duty in determining **operator** Terri Sutton's case. She may have sent police to the house to punish the boy for playing on the phone, but at least she sent help, the judge said.

"The sentence was fair," said Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Lora Weingarden. "Some members of the community probably wanted her to go to jail for up to a year. But Ms. Nichols was fired from her job, and when she is not serving as a **911 operator**, she's not a problem."

Robert Turner, now 7 and a third-grader living with his 24-year-old sister in Albion, testified at the trial that Nichols hung up on him. The boy and his family didn't attend Tuesday's sentencing.

The courtroom was packed with Nichols' friends, co-workers, members of her church and an officer from the **911 operators** union, the American Federation of State and Municipal Employees.

Albert Garrett, president of AFSME Council 25, said in a letter read aloud by the judge that neglect of duty was meant to punish misbehavior by elected officials and sworn police officers. In urging the judge to go easy on Nichols, Garrett said the city's **911** system is understaffed, overworked and poorly equipped.

Nichols said she made a quick judgment about the call while working on 4 1/2 hours of sleep the day after working a double shift.

Caption: Sharon Nichols thought 5-year-old Robert Turner's call was a prank. But police discovered his mother's body.

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