

## **BEST FRIENDS DEFENDANT PLEADS GUILTY**

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**Stacey Culbert** , who faced a possible death penalty in a federal murder and drug trafficking trial opening today in Detroit, chose instead Tuesday to plead guilty.

He is the fourth of five defendants to avoid the risk of execution by not going to trial. The fifth is dead. The government sought to have the five men executed in the prosecution of the members of Best Friends, a Detroit-based multistate drug ring.

Tuesday's last-minute plea does not stop the trial of eight other defendants before U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn.

Under an agreement with federal prosecutors, **Culbert** , 26, is expected to face 50 years to life in prison for two intentional killings and two counts of using firearms in drug offenses. Hewas charged with the slayings of Frank Maxwell and Michael Mitchell.

If **Culbert** had been convicted at trial, jurors could have decided on lethal injection at the federal prison in Terre Haute, Ind.

Though Michigan never has had capital punishment a 1988 federal law permits the death penalty in federal cases involving drug-related homicides.

The last legal execution in Michigan was a 1938 federal case in which a man was hanged at Milan Correctional Facility for committing a murder during a bank robbery.

More than 100 witnesses are expected to testify in the trial of the remaining defendants.

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