

NAACP SAYS MOM SHOULDN'T BE CHARGED PROSECUTOR'S DECISION CALLED DOUBLE STANDARD

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Saying Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Duggan has demonstrated a "double standard of justice" in several cases, the Detroit Branch NAACP on Thursday urged Duggan to rethink his decision to file a criminal child abuse charge against a young mother who left her baby with a stranger at a Detroit bus stop.

The mother, 20-year-old Shaniqua Betty of Pontiac, faces up to four years in prison on the charge of second-degree child abuse. Her baby, 3-month-old Isaiah Lewis, was killed within hours of being left with the stranger at 1 a.m. on Aug. 3.

"We believe that Mr. Duggan overlooks and disregards the history of Shaniqua Betty," the Rev. Wendell Anthony told reporters at an afternoon news conference. Anthony is the Detroit president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"She has been prosecuted, judged and unfortunately victimized by a life of executions related to negligence, indifference and abuse. We have in Shaniqua Betty a tragedy of tragedies," Anthony said. He applauded Detroit police investigators who had argued that Betty should not be prosecuted.

"If the intent of the prosecutor's office is to 'protect children and to stand up for the community,' then this is an example of a lack of protection and a lack of respect for the community."

Duggan responded by saying Anthony was "a longtime political enemy of mine" and that the criticism was irrational.

"My perspective is purely from that of the victims and the victim was 3-month-old Isaiah Lewis, not the mother," Duggan said.

Anthony described Betty's history of being abused and neglected as a child and the failure by the Oakland County Family Independence Agency to provide her with court-ordered counseling and therapy from ages 11 to 19.

Flanked by other black activists and NAACP board members, Anthony called on Michigan Attorney General Jennifer Granholm to review the case.

Betty's attorney, Steven Fishman, said he welcomed the NAACP's support.

"I'm hopeful that community support will assist my client through these difficult times."

Anthony cited the Betty case and other incidents as examples of what he called a double standard of justice coming from the prosecutor's office since Duggan became prosecutor in January.

Anthony mentioned Duggan's decision to charge two white boys, ages 14 and 15, as juveniles in the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl inside Wayne Memorial High School, while charging four black students, ages 13 to 15, of Hutchins Middle School in Detroit as adults with raping a 12-year-old girl inside that school.

Convicted juveniles may be sent to residential treatment facility for one to two years where they can expect to be given psychological counseling and educational opportunities. Kids convicted as adults on a rape charge can be sentenced to up to life in prison with little hope of getting an education or help with their emotional or mental problems.

"One has to wonder, are we witnessing a double standard of justice in Wayne County?" Anthony said.

On Aug. 6, Duggan surprised many observers when he decided not to prosecute Wayne County Circuit Judge Richard B. Halloran Jr., who allegedly exposed himself to an undercover officer in a rest room at Metro Airport in July.

Anthony said that if he had been caught doing what Halloran allegedly did, he surely would have been prosecuted -- "not that I would engage in that type of behavior."

Duggan said "few rational people would equate the death of a 3-month-old baby with an indecent exposure charge in a rest room."

Noting that Isaiah was a black child, as was the 12-year-old rape victim at Hutchins, Duggan said, "I am going to do everything in my power to prosecute people who hurt children and I don't care who criticizes me for it."

Harold Reed, 48, of Detroit is charged with first-degree murder and child abuse in the death of Isaiah. His preliminary examination, which was scheduled for Thursday, was postponed until Aug. 30.

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Caption: Photo

(following captions appeared in Oakland edition, page 4B)

Mike Duggan calls the NAACP criticism irrational.

Shaniqua Betty could face prison on the charge of child abuse.

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