

COUSIN RECOUNTS TEEN GIRL'S SLAYING - SHE TELLS COURT SUSPECT OPENED FIRE OUTSIDE STORE

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Seconds after 15-year-old Cherrel Thomas was fatally wounded, she told her **cousin** : "Keita, he got me. I'm shot." Then, she laid down in the backseat of the car in which she was riding, and began praying loudly.

Cherrel's **cousin** , Lakeita Alexander, never saw her alive again.

On Tuesday, Alexander, 23, testified at a preliminary examination in 36th District Court about the events of April 30, the night Cherrel was killed in Detroit. Two Detroit men, Terrill Johnson, 17, and Jesse Freeman, 21, are charged in connection with Cherrel's death.

Johnson, who police say pulled the trigger, is charged with first-degree murder and felony firearm, in which a gun is used to commit a felony. Freeman is charged with second-degree murder and felony firearm. If convicted, both face up to life in prison.

Before Judge Donald Coleman could rule whether the defendants would be bound over for trial in Wayne County Circuit Court, Johnson's attorney Mary Hickey argued that her client, who turned himself in to police, didn't have his rights read to him. Coleman adjourned the case, and in a week the booking officer is expected to testify that Johnson's rights were read.

During the hearing Tuesday, Alexander testified that she was driving with a friend and Cherrel on the city's west side on April 30. The group had stopped by another woman's house because the woman had some clothing that belonged to Alexander and her friend. Alexander said she spoke to Johnson, the woman's brother, and asked where she was. He told Alexander she would be back.

Alexander said she then drove about a block, to Northlawn and Stawell, and parked to wait for a friend who went to the store. She said Johnson approached her car and asked her to roll down the window. She said no. He then told her he would give her one more chance to roll down the window.

Alexander testified that Cherrell said in a panicky voice: "He's got a gun." She said she drove away as Johnson raised the gun and shot.

Alexander said she later stopped the car to allow her friend to drive because she wanted to be in the backseat with Cherrel. She said they saw an EMS vehicle exiting the Davison Freeway as they approached a busy intersection. Alexander said she flagged the vehicle down. The EMS officials transported Cherrel to Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, but Cherrel died from a gunshot wound to the back.

She is one of nine children 16 and younger who have died from gunfire in Detroit this year.

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Caption: Photo

Terrill Johnson

Jesse Freeman

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