

SENTENCED MOM TAKES BLAME FOR KIDS' DEATHS - DETROIT WOMAN GETS 12 1/2 -60 YEARS IN '02 HOT-CAR NEGLIGENCE

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A repentant mother who killed her two children by leaving them in a hot car for hours accepted her punishment in Oakland County Circuit Court on Wednesday -- and admitted she made a terrible decision.

"If I could turn back the hands of time," she said in a shaky voice, "we would not be standing here today -- and I wouldn't be dying on the inside."

Tarajee Maynor, 27, of Detroit was sentenced to 12 1/2 to 60 years in prison after pleading guilty to second-degree murder earlier this month. She left her 3-year-old son, Adonnis, and 10-month-old daughter, Acacia, locked in a 1995 Dodge Neon while she visited a Southfield salon on June 28, 2002.

"I was careless and negligent," she said. "I made the worst decision that I've ever made in my life in leaving my children alone -- the worst decision that a parent, a mother, could possibly make, and because of that, my children died."

The sentencing marked the end of a legal case that went to the state Supreme Court -- and was settled before it went to trial.

The case has inflamed public sentiment and led the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office to seek changes in murder statutes.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Wendy Potts called **Maynor** irresponsible.

Said Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Joyce Todd, who has been a prosecutor for 25 years: "It's very hard for me to remember any death that's more senseless than this. It's a tragedy because she was callous and selfish."

While **Maynor** visited a Southfield salon for nearly four hours, her children endured an agonizing death. She tried on clothes, got a massage, had her hair done in the air conditioning. Her children struggled to get out and gasped for breath.

The temperature was 86 degrees that day. Only one of the car windows was open -- cracked slightly.

When **Maynor** returned to the sweltering car, her children were dead. Vomit covered the backseat.

Maynor drove around for about three hours, then took the dead children to Providence Hospital in Southfield and told police a lie -- that the children had been abducted. She later gave a more accurate account, prosecutors said.

Police found the young boy's fingerprints -- and face prints -- near the top of the window left open only about an inch. It also appeared he had tried to help his baby sister get out of her car seat by unbuckling it, investigators said.

The children, medical examiners said, died of hyperthermia or overheating. **Maynor** was charged with first-degree murder.

The case was bound over for 46th District Judge Stephen Cooper, but the charge was reduced to manslaughter because it was not clear whether **Maynor** intended to kill her children.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Potts reinstated the first-degree murder charge.

Maynor appealed. Then the prosecution appealed.

And finally, the issue was settled by the Michigan Supreme Court. The court ruled that **Maynor** could be charged with first-degree murder, but the prosecution must prove that the mother had intended to leave them in the car to kill them.

By that standard, Todd said, it would have been impossible to convict her of first-degree murder.

Both sides reached a deal.

Maynor 's attorney, Elbert Hatchett, said justice was done.

Todd said she hopes the law will be changed so that if there is a case like it again, it would be easier to convict the suspect of first-degree murder. That would require a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Maynor will be eligible for parole after 12 1/2 years, two of which she has already served.

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Caption: Photo

Maynor , shown in 2002, got 12 1/2---60 years for leaving 2 in a hot car.

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