

MURDER CHARGE IS DISMISSED PROSECUTOR SEEKS TO REISSUE WARRANT AGAINST REPUTED DRUG GANGSTER

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Detroit 36th District Judge Daphne Means Curtis dismissed murder charges Friday against Ragheed (Ray) Akrawi, overruling her gut feeling that the reputed drug gang lieutenant engineered the killing of Adnan Jihad.

"My gut reaction" is that Akrawi, 21, hired the killers, supplied the gun, pointed out the victim and drove them to the scene, Curtis said in dismissing the charges after a preliminary examination.

"But my gut reaction is not evidence," she said.

Curtis ordered two Detroit teenagers to stand trial for the killing after hearing their confessions, in which they said they were hired by Akrawi to shoot Jihad the night of Sept. 11 as he stood in front of a coffeehouse on the 17800 block of John R Street.

Curtis ruled that the confessions of Thomas Harris, 19, and Tim Jackson, 18, could not be used against Akrawi.

Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair said he was disappointed by Curtis' ruling but was seeking additional evidence that would allow him to reissue a murder charge against Akrawi.

"I'll do more than put out the welcome mat, I'll put it out on a neon sign: This office is always interested in information from the public or persons involved," O'Hair said.

Because the dismissal came before trial, the charges against Akrawi can be reinstated if new evidence is presented.

The hearing was held under extraordinary security at the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice. Detroit police officers and Wayne County Sheriff's deputies -- and numerous plainclothes federal agents -- filled the basement courtroom. Spectators were searched twice before being admitted.

Authorities fear the dismissal could spark further violence in the 7 Mile Road- John R Street-Woodward Avenue area, already wracked by bombings and shootings.

Jihad, 52, was gunned down to avenge the February assassination of Akrawi's cousin, **Harry Kalasho**, according to the confessions. **Kalasho** has been identified in federal court as head of a major wholesale cocaine operation.

Jihad's son, Raed, is charged with murder in the **Kalasho** slaying, which allegedly was carried out in retaliation for **Kalasho**'s suspected role in two hired killings late last year.

The younger Jihad, who is free on bond, attended the hearing Friday and tried to adopt a philosophical attitude after Curtis' ruling.

"I guess the judge had to go by the law," he said.

Akrawi, who greeted Curtis' decision with a small tight smile, is still in custody after his indictment Thursday for federal firearm violations.

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