

TRUMBULL COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

Dennis Watkins, Prosecutor
Repeat Violent Offenders newsletter
Update, Nov. 9, 2023



For the 29th time, death row inmate Danny Lee Hill, at left, through his counsel has brought to court a new legal action which will initiate another hearing in a bid to escape the death penalty for which he was sentenced more than 37 years ago.

On Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023, the Ohio 11th District Court of Appeals in Warren, specifically Judges Robert Patton, Matt Lynch and John Eklund, heard the latest case filed by Hill who wants his death sentence overturned because he claims he has an intellectual disability, something the United States Supreme Court has ruled would exempt him for receiving the death penalty.

Senior Assistant Attorney General Stephen Maher argued for the state on Thursday, trying to uphold the decision made earlier this year by Judge Patricia Cosgrove who ruled that she would not order a new hearing to determine whether Hill is intellectually disabled, formerly referred to as mentally retarded. Maher has worked with Prosecutor Watkins and his staff for over 20 years on many of Hill's appeals.

During Thursday's hearing, the arguments brought by Hill's public defenders centered around recently adopted legal and medical standards which were not in existence at the time of Hill's initial claims of mental retardation. The three 11th District judges will consider the arguments and then render a decision at a later date.

A three-judge panel in 1986 found Hill guilty of the Sept. 10, 1985, kidnapping, rape and murder of 12-year-old Raymond Fife as the boy was headed to a Boy Scout meeting on the southwest side of Warren.

In the 37 years since he was given the death penalty, Hill has sought review in the U.S. Supreme Court three times, Hill's case has come before a panel of the U.S. Sixth Circuit four times and the en banc or full Sixth Circuit court has heard his case twice. It was just this August that an 11-3 vote of the full Sixth Circuit reversed Hill's bid to have his death sentence overturned based upon a "new claim" of an old argument regarding bite mark evidence.

Thursday's case is another constitutional claim which has been repeatedly litigated in both state and federal courts where Hill has already lost.

"At almost every turn, courts have ruled against him," says Trumbull County Prosecutor Dennis Watkins.

Since Hill's brutal attack and arrest in September 1985, Watkins noted that the mother of the victim, Miriam Fife, and her family have attended the trial and numerous hearings -- and for over 38 years now -- spending many days and hundreds of hours in courtrooms and reliving the horrors of the crime against their loved one, failing to see a final outcome in their own bids to see justice done.

"Miriam and her family need closure, some kind of conclusion to this case," Watkins said.

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