

17-year-old gets 15 years for shooting stepdad

By Celeste Beam
Staff Reporter

Last Thursday, September 11, Andrew Paul Bennewitz of Alexandria was sentenced to 180 months (15 years) in prison for attempting to murder his stepfather.

This past August, Bennewitz pleaded guilty to attempted first-degree murder of his then stepfather, James Blenker, on February 5, 2007.

Blenker survived the shooting, but the bullet severed his spinal cord, which paralyzed him from the waist down. Blenker will spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair, according to authorities.

During the September 11 sentencing in Douglas County District Court, Judge Conrad Freeberg denied a motion by the defense attorney, Kent Marshall, to allow Bennewitz to serve a lesser sentence.

"We hoped for some-



A. Bennewitz
SENTENCED

where a good kid does a bad thing.

"It's frustrating that this young man didn't believe he had another choice," he added. "There is nothing that can justify shooting another human being...But Andrew was subjected to psychological damage. There was no good outcome here. Blenker is paralyzed. Andrew is going to prison. It's just a horrible situation."

The judge also ordered Bennewitz to pay \$28,000 in restitution to Blenker and \$13,000 to the Crime Victims Reparations

who ended up in a bad situation."

Marshall also said that the justice system is not well suited to handle these types of cases -

"I think Andrew is a good kid who ended up in a bad situation."

Kent Marshall
DEFENSE ATTORNEY

almost every aspect of his life. Family members who were sitting in the gallery reportedly broke down and cried during the sentencing.

Bennewitz, who also had the opportunity to address the court, turned to Blenker and, in a soft voice, offered an apology, according to Douglas County Attorney Chris Karpan.

In a statement to the newspaper Monday afternoon, Karpan said, "This is a frustrating case because there was no rhyme or reason to Bennewitz'

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"Most people who talked to me after they heard about the crime immediately wanted to know what [Blenker] did that caused this," said Karpan. "Let me be clear, there is nothing James Blenker did to justify these actions, whatsoever. The frustrations this family was experiencing before the shooting were similar to problems countless other mixed families in Douglas County are struggling with.

"It was only in the mind of Mr. Bennewitz that these issues seemed overwhelming," concluded Karpan.

Background

Bennewitz, who was 17 at the time of the shooting, was certified to stand trial as an adult during court proceedings in the summer of 2007.

The case was set for trial in Douglas County District Court but when Bennewitz pleaded guilty, the trial was deemed unnecessary.

The shooting happened near County Road 86 in Hudson Township. Bennewitz dialed 911, saying that he shot his stepfather.

When initially questioned by authorities, Bennewitz talked about an incident that prompted him to plan the shooting: Fifteen days earlier, Bennewitz became frustrated by the detailed manner in which Blenker was assigning household chores.

Bennewitz also said he was frustrated with his stepfather's parenting and didn't want the younger children in the family to be subject to the same things he was, according to the criminal complaint.

On the night of the shooting, court documents state that Bennewitz lured his stepfather out of the house by saying there was something wrong with his car. After Blenker went outside to look, Bennewitz followed him into the garage area and shot twice with a handgun from a distance of eight to 10 feet.