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In May 6 Jefferson City killing

PA amends murder charge to first degree

By NATALIE FIELEKE
News Tribune

The Cole County prosecutor is amending the charge of Christopher B. Harris, accused of killing neighbor Moreland Jefferson, from second-degree murder to first-degree murder.

Prosecutor Bill Tackett said a lengthy discussion with the medical examiner Friday played a significant role in changing Harris' charge to first-degree murder.

Although Tackett said he could not refer to the facts in the medical examiner's report, he noted key differences between degrees of murder.

"The key difference ... is deliberation," he said. "It's defined as 'cool reflection for a period of time, no matter how brief,' and that's what will have to be argued and proven at trial."

Tackett said second-degree murder carries a penalty of 10 to 30 years in prison or life, while the first-degree charge could result in life without the possibility of parole.

The charge of first-degree murder also would allow a prosecutor to seek the death penalty, something that Tackett said isn't even a

consideration in this case because it lacks the "statutory aggravators" or the necessary series of things that must be present.

While the charge and the possible penalty have changed, other aspects of the case remain the same.

Harris' preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Monday.

"The witnesses are the same, the evidence is the same, it's the charge that we will present that's different," Tackett said.

Harris is being jailed in lieu of \$1 million bond for the killing and the additional felony charge in connection with the March 19 stabbing of his former girlfriend.

According to a police probable cause statement, Harris allegedly confessed Jefferson's murder to investigators during interrogation.

Jefferson, 43, was found dead in the doorway of his Jefferson City apartment May 6 after being beaten and stabbed.

Harris reportedly told investigators he was having an argument with Jefferson about 4 p.m. Friday in the apartment building where they both lived.

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