

Phillips murder trial moved to Fulton

By **BOB WATSON**
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Shannon Phillips' murder trial will be held in Fulton.

Cole County Circuit Judge Thomas J. Brown III on Tuesday morning granted a defense motion for a change of venue.

The motion was based partly on the publicity surrounding the Oct. 22, 2003, murder of inmate Toby Viles in the State Penitentiary's Ice House, and the disappearance of Phillips and fellow inmate Chris Sims in an escape attempt.

"For four days, the media had a huge amount of publicity," Susan Elliot, one of two public defenders representing Phillips, reminded Brown.

"The sheriff was on television ... saying there was a huge amount of danger to the public."

Cole County Prosecutor Bill Tackett plans to seek the death penalty for Phillips.

Although Phillips has been

charged with first-degree murder in Viles' killing, Sims has not been charged yet with any crime in connection with either the murder or the escape attempt.

Phillips told investigators, in a videotaped statement that was played during his Nov. 17, 2004, preliminary hearing, that he and Sims decided to kill Viles as they began an escape that all three of the men planned.

Phillips said in the taped statement that Sims actually wielded the pickax, but "it was my idea to kill Toby (because) I felt he would be too dangerous of a person" after the trio got out of the prison.

After the killing, Phillips and Sims hid between two walls just a few feet from the victim's body.

They reportedly planned to stay hidden until the MSP's inmates were transferred to the new Jefferson City Correctional Center in eastern Cole County, but were found by investigators only four days after the murder.