

Jury Trials Are Back In Madison County After Break Because Of COVID-19 Pandemic

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EDWARDSVILLE — Madison County State's Attorney's Office jury trial teams are back following state mandates to postpone due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The first felony jury trial in over six months began this week in front of Circuit Judge Kyle Napp with jury selection in the People vs. Michael Weis. Jury selection began on

Monday and opening arguments began Tuesday morning. A guilty verdict was returned late last night finding the defendant Michael Weis, 36, of Granite City, guilty of three counts of Criminal Sexual Assault, two counts of Aggravated Criminal Sexual Abuse, and three counts of Child Pornography for the acts involving a 13-year-old victim.

In order to properly comply with Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for slowing the spread of COVID-19, the courtroom appeared fairly different. The courtroom where witnesses testified was closed to the public. Instead of the jurors sitting next to one another in the jury stand, jurors were spread out in the benches where the public typically is seated. A web camera was set up to face the witness stand where live video footage appeared on a projector screen in another courtroom allowing for the public to still listen and watch the trial. Limited capacity was allowed in the public courtroom.

First Assistant State's Attorney Crystal Uhe who supervises the operations of the office, stated, "This week's trial proved we can continue to deliver justice for our victims while taking precautions to slow the spread of the virus. The first trial back was a tremendous success for the victim and particularly our Children's Justice Division. By continuing to move trials forward, our office can continue to provide a voice to the vulnerable victims of heinous and violent crime."

A first-degree murder bench trial will be heard beginning on Monday, September 28th also in front of Circuit Judge Kyle Napp. Chief of the Violent Crimes Unit and First Assistant State's Attorney Crystal Uhe will be representing Eldon Williams of Godfrey, IL, who was shot and killed in October 2018 by defendant Donald Nelson of Alton, IL.

Because the murder trial beginning on Monday is a non-jury trial, a limited number of family members and close friends will be allowed to sit in the public seats. When the maximum COVID-19 capacity is met, the public will be able to watch the People vs. Donald Nelson bench trial by live video footage in another courtroom in the same way this week's trial was conducted. Precautionary measures will continue to be administered such as sanitizing the witness stand following each witness.

"Our mission is to get justice for victims and our community, and we are happy to finally be able to get back to that critical work. It takes tough, experienced professionals in law enforcement to successfully take predators and violent criminals off the streets and put them behind bars. Yesterday's guilty verdict is a great beginning and I'm looking forward to securing justice for Mr. Williams and his family and friends next week," stated First Assistant State's Attorney Crystal Uhe.