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Judge throws out Minus murder charge

By LISA MEYER

Henry Minus, 27, allegedly met with 15-year-old Hanifah Allen in the North Clinton Avenue apartment she shared with her mother, Gloria, on Feb. 6, 2001. Five days later, she found her daughter's decomposing body inside a cramped living-room closet.

Minus, of Beverly, still faces second-degree charges of rape and manslaughter. He also faces third-degree endangering the welfare of a child.

Minus had been charged with felony murder because the victim was killed during an alleged sex act. Sex with a minor is a felony in New Jersey.

Judge Bill Mathesius said that while tragic, Hanifah Allen's death was not a foreseeable or probable consequence of the alleged rape. He will instruct jurors on the remaining charges before they begin their deliberations today.

After the judge ruled on the most egregious charge, attorneys presented their summations yesterday.

Police got the wrong man, defense attorney Robin Lord argued.

For nearly two hours, Lord chipped away at the state's theory by trying to plant 21 doubts in jurors' minds and essentially pinned the

homicide on the victim's own mother.

Gloria Allen, who was sitting in the audience, pursed her lips and shook her head as Lord told jurors that she "dilly-dallied" at work while her daughter was missing and how she came home each day and "relaxed" before finally calling police or opening the closet and peering in.

And Lord added up what she deemed discrepancies in testimonies.

"Would somebody mind telling me how to shine a battery's flashlight into a closet?" Lord exclaimed with a whiff of sarcasm.

Lord also dredged up two other names that police had not fully investigated, she said.

Gloria Allen's ex-boyfriend -- who had been "messing around" with one of Hanifah's sisters when they lived in the projects -- also had a set of keys to the apartment, Lord said. This explains why Gloria Allen changed the locks immediately after Hanifah disappeared, she said.

And at school on the last day Hanifah was seen alive, "she fears Greg Turner so much she asks a teacher's aid to walk her to the bus," Lord said, "and was never seen again." Greg Turner coincidentally didn't call his girlfriend for two days, then lied to her mother, Lord said.

Assistant Prosecutor Brian McCauley has maintained that Henry Minus killed Hanifah Allen in her home and that two weeks later he provided police with the details of the fatal encounter.

"The defense attorney argues that this is only a piece of paper," he said, waving a blank sheet before them. "But this, ladies and gentlemen, is a confession."

Only the killer could know that the attack occurred in the bathtub and that the body was in the closet, McCauley said.

Minus easily found his way to Trenton on weekends to drink with his brother, but he couldn't attend the funeral of a family friend, McCauley said.

Also, water can damage fingerprints, "like from someone who fished a dead girl out of the tub," McCauley explained.

And Henry Minus cried, McCauley said, not because he cared about Hanifah Allen but "because he didn't want to go to jail."