

METRO

WOODALL HEARING CANCELED AFTER ATTORNEY HOSPITALIZED

JOHN LUCAS, Courier Western Kentucky bureau (502)

333-4899 or jlucas@evansville.net

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A sentencing hearing for Robert Keith Woodall, who pleaded guilty Friday to the 1997 kidnapping, rape and murder of a 16-year-old Greenville, Ky., girl, has been postponed indefinitely.

The expected three-day hearing was canceled abruptly Tuesday after Woodall's lead attorney was hospitalized Monday evening.

Caldwell Circuit Judge Bill Cunningham, who was to preside over the hearing and who will set Woodall's sentence, said he had been told Michael Williams, a member of the Kentucky Department of Public Advocacy staff, had suffered a ministroke.

Co-counsel Mark Baker of Central City, Ky., said Williams became dizzy and disoriented before being admitted to Muhlenberg Community Hospital at Greenville. He was later transferred to Owensboro Mercy Health System at Owensboro, Ky .

Cunningham said he had spoken to Williams' attending physician, who had said it was too early to give an accurate diagnosis or speculate when he would be able to resume his duties.

A spokesman for the Owensboro hospital said Williams had requested no information be released about his condition.

Cunningham will conduct a telephone conference with attorneys in the case Friday afternoon to schedule another sentencing hearing.

It is the second time illness by Williams has delayed prosecution of Woodall for the Jan. 25, 1997, death of Sarah Hansen, a student at Muhlenberg South High School .

A planned Feb. 23 trial was delayed after Williams said he was physically and mentally unable to prepare adequately after finishing a death penalty defense at Mayfield, Ky., earlier that month.

Woodall unexpectedly pleaded guilty to all charges at a pretrial hearing Friday; his trial had been scheduled to start Monday.

The plea was made without a plea agreement, and Muhlenberg Commonwealth's Attorney Ralph Vick has said he intends to ask Cunningham to sentence Woodall to death.

Police say Woodall, 24, abducted Miss Hansen from the parking lot of a Greenville convenience store where she had gone to rent a video. She was taken to a nearby lake where she was raped, her throat slashed and her body thrown into the lake .

Williams said Friday that Woodall has no memory of that night.

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