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Agencies push to try Edmonds as child

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STARKVILLE - Four juvenile advocates were in Starkville Tuesday preaching from the courthouse steps their belief that juveniles should never be tried in court as adults.

Just one floor above them, the juvenile prompting their appearance was standing trial for the murder of his step-sister's ex-husband. Tyler Edmonds is being tried as an adult for an Oktibbeha County shooting death that occurred when he was 13.

Outside, Bishop Thomas Master of New Macedonia Baptist Church in West Palm Beach, Fla., national president and founder of Under Our Wings, a child-advocacy organization, spoke against a court system that allows children to stand trial as adults for certain crimes.

"No matter what the crime is alleged to be, you're still dealing with the mindset of a child," Master said. "Children are less culpable and more redeemable than adults. That's why we have a juvenile justice system."

Masters said in a juvenile justice system, a child can be rehabilitated and educated, and can later vote, join the military and be a productive member of society. In an adult system, the child offender's "only option is to go to the street," he said.

Masters was not arguing that youth offenders should not be tried or punished, but simply that they should not be tried as adults. He said youths who excel academically are not granted rights reserved for adults, such as voting or joining the military. He questioned why these same youths should be punished as an adult when they commit a crime.

"I don't know how anyone can look at a child and say they are unrehabilitatable," added Cari Barichello of Streator, Ill., another member of the organization.

Katy Porter of Pensacola, Fla., is an administrator with Justice for Juveniles. She said the two groups' presence in Oktibbeha County was to urge the court system to treat Edmonds as a child. She said her organization does continuous research looking for instances nationwide where children are being tried as adults for crimes. Her group intervenes when possible, arguing they should face a system designed for youth.

"I don't see how you can get justice, because the adult system was not designed for children," Porter said.

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