

Fulgham pleads guilty to attempted escape, sentenced

By BRIAN HAWKINS/Starkville Daily News

Kristi Leigh Fulgham faces 12 years in prison after pleading guilty to charges of attempted escape and furnishing an improper device to an inmate in Oktibbeha County Circuit Court late Tuesday afternoon.

Fulgham's plea was the last action of the court prior to recessing for the day.

Judge Jim Kitchens sentenced Fulgham, 29, to serve four years in prison on the attempted escape charge and eight years in prison on the charge furnishing an improper device to an inmate. The sentences will be served consecutively.

Kitchens did not levy any fines against Fulgham on either charge, though he did order to her to pay all court costs associated with the case.

Fulgham was under indictment on the charges in connection with two incidents:

€ Oct. 7, 2004 - She attempted "by force" to escape from the Oktibbeha County Jail, where she had been held since May 2003 since her arrest on a capital murder charge in the shooting death of her husband, Joseph T. "Joey" Fulgham, 28.

€ Aug. 16, 2004 - She furnished another county jail inmate with a cellular phone and charger, both of which are considered contraband for jail inmates and are not allowed.

Under state law, the attempted escape charge carried a maximum penalty of five years in prison and up to a \$10,000 fine. The charge of furnishing an improper device to an inmate carried a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and up to a \$25,000 fine.

Fulgham had previously pleaded not guilty to both charges and was scheduled to be tried on them next week. Kitchens accepted her change in plea only after extensive questioning, including whether she had been coerced into pleading guilty via threats against her or her family.

"I know that it's in my best interests," said Fulgham in response to questioning from Kitchens on whether she was guilty of the charges. "I am guilty."

Two other men have also been charged with aiding Fulgham in the escape attempt, and Circuit Court action in their cases is still pending.

Fulgham still faces trial on the capital murder charge in her husband's death, though no trial date has been set in that case. Judge Lee Howard is presiding over Fulgham's capital murder trial after Kitchens recused himself from the case in early November.

Fulgham's attorney, Stephanie Mallette, had filed written motions seeking Kitchens' recusal from the capital murder trial based upon comments he made during the July 24, 2004, sentencing hearing for Tyler Edmonds, Fulgham's half-brother, who was also convicted of murder in Joey Fulgham's death.

During Edmonds sentencing hearing in open court, Kitchens commented that he believed Kristi Fulgham led Mr. Edmonds to kill Joey Fulgham or participate in the killing. At the time of Edmonds' sentencing, no court proceedings had occurred in Kristi Fulgham's case other than her arraignment, according to Mallette's written motion.

Edmonds is currently serving a life sentence in prison and will be eligible for parole at age 65.

Joey Fulgham was shot to death on May 10, 2003, at the home he and his wife shared with their two children in Buckner Street in the Longview community west of Starkville.

With her guilty pleas and sentencing Tuesday, Fulgham will be likely be transferred from the county jail to a Mississippi Department of Corrections facility, court officials said Tuesday.

Fulgham's father and Joey Fulgham's mother were present in the courtroom during Tuesday afternoon's proceedings.

Editor's note: Additional new stories about Oktibbeha County Circuit Court actions will be published over the next several days as the winter court term continues. Court action resumes at 9 a.m. today.