

Philadelphia Abortion Doctor on Trial Ran 'House of Horrors,' Says Prosecutor

Editor's Note: *This story contains graphic material that may upset some readers.*

Dr. Kermit Gosnell ran a "house of horrors" in a West Philadelphia health clinic where women went for late-term abortions, a prosecutor said in his opening statement on Monday in a trial that will decide if the doctor is guilty of murder in the deaths of seven infants and a woman.

The district attorney's office contends Gosnell, 72, delivered live babies and then deliberately severed their spinal cords, killing them. "This is not a case about abortion," Assistant District Attorney Joanne Pescatore told the jury. "This is a case about murder."

Gosnell's defense lawyer, John McMahon, characterized the prosecution of his client, who is black, as "elitist, racist" and said, "They (prosecutors) want to put a Mayo Clinic standard on a West Philadelphia clinic."

The charges against Gosnell and nine of his employees have rekindled the debate in the United States about late-term abortions. Abortions are banned in Pennsylvania after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

McMahon tried to cast doubt on whether the deaths of the infants constituted homicide. "The first rule of homicide is someone has to be alive," he told the jury. He said the gestational age of infants is plus or minus three weeks. "The estimates here are nothing more than guesses," he said.

At the time his office filed the charges in 2011, District

Attorney and chief prosecutor Seth Williams, who is also black, said he knew abortion was a hot-button issue but that “a doctor who cuts into the necks severing the spinal cords of living, breathing babies who would survive with proper medical attention, is committing murder under the law.”

Gosnell, who has been in jail since his January 2011 arrest, ran a clinic called the Women’s Medical Society.

He faces 26 charges, including murder for the deaths of the seven infants and a woman who visited his office.

The prosecution contends the woman died of a drug overdose administered by the clinic. If found guilty of this charge, Gosnell could face the death penalty.

Dressed in a dark business suit, Gosnell displayed no emotion during the opening statements of the trial, which is expected to last several weeks.

Pescatore described unsanitary conditions, cats that ran around the office, medical equipment that did not work and the bodies of babies “that were treated like trash.”

“When you got inside (the clinic), it was like a house of horrors,” Pescatore said.

Gosnell, she said, killed them by snipping their spinal cords as soon as they were born.

“You are a doctor,” she said. “You have to at a minimum keep these babies alive ... That does not mean you can take a pair of scissors and plunge it into their spinal cord,” she told the jury.

If the newborn is breathing, she told the jury, “You cannot kill it. That’s murder. That’s a human being.”

She said when investigators raided the clinic with a search warrant in February 2010, “They saw more than they probably

wanted to see for the rest of their lives.”

McMahon told the jury that of 47 fetuses found in a clinic freezer, 45 were clearly legal, under the legal limit (of 24 weeks). “The whole theory is bogus because this baby was not born alive.”

Of the remaining two, McMahon said of one of them, “You know what the evidence is going to show? Zero.”

“Their who theory is bogus because this baby was not born alive,” McMahon said.

He said autopsy results on the other showed, “The baby never lived.”

Gosnell pleaded not guilty to the charges on Monday, as did the other defendant on trial, Eileen O’Neill, a medical school graduate who does not have a license to practice medicine. Theft by deception and false swearing are included in the charges against O’Neill.

Eight other defendants have pleaded guilty to a variety of charges and are awaiting sentencing.

Editing by Daniel Trotta

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