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State to Seek Death Penalty Against Joanne Zephir

OSCEOLA COUNTY, Fla. – The Ninth Judicial Circuit State Attorney’s Office has filed a Notice of Intent to Seek the Death Penalty for Joanne Zephir in the murder of her 3-year-old child.

On May 8, 2022, Osceola County sheriff’s deputies arrested Zephir for stabbing her husband and hours later, forcing her two children, ages 3 and 8, to drink bleach, before strangling her 3-year-old child to death. The husband and 8-year-old were treated at the hospital and survived.

Zephir became eligible for the death penalty after an Osceola County grand jury indicted the defendant on First Degree Murder with a Weapon in February, which is a capital felony. The defendant was also indicted on Attempted First Degree Murder with a Weapon and Attempted Felony Murder with a Weapon.

In their notice, prosecutors said the decision to seek the death penalty is based on statutory aggravators including the victim being younger than 12 years old, the victim of the capital felony being particularly vulnerable because the defendant stood in a position of familial or custodial authority over the victim and the capital felony being committed while the defendant was engaged in the commission of, or an attempt to commit, aggravated child abuse.

Please check the Osceola County Clerk of Courts website for updates on the defendant’s future court appearances.

Our office acknowledges the public interest surrounding this case. However, we cannot provide further comment to protect the integrity of the case.

Charges are merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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