



## RI Man in Death Penalty Battle to Plead Guilty

By: Michelle R. Smith – July 26, 2013

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A Rhode Island man at the center of a capital punishment battle between the state and federal governments agreed to plead guilty Friday in exchange for federal prosecutors dropping plans to seek the death penalty.

Jason Pleau, 35, agreed to plead guilty to robbery, conspiracy and using a firearm in a crime of violence in the 2010 killing of David Main, according to a plea agreement filed in U.S. District Court in Providence. As part of the agreement, both sides will recommend a sentence of life in prison without parole.

Pleau was scheduled to change his plea during a hearing on Wednesday before U.S. District Judge William Smith.

Main was a gas station manager and was shot to death outside a Woonsocket bank on Sept. 20, 2010, as he was making deposit.

Federal prosecutors cited Main's violent criminal history and said he had shown no remorse for his crimes when they announced their intention to seek the death penalty.

Gov. Lincoln Chafee fought unsuccessfully to keep Pleau out of federal custody because of the threat of capital punishment. Chafee said the state had rejected the use of the death penalty and that it was an issue of state's rights. The National Governor's Association, attorneys general from seven states, the conservative Cato Institute, the American Civil Liberties Union and others filed court papers supporting his position.

But an appeals court ruled last year the state must surrender Pleau to federal officials, and the U.S. Supreme Court in January declined to take up Chafee's appeal of that ruling.

Chafee's office issued a written statement in which he said his thoughts were with Main's family.

"The case today has reached a conclusion, and Mr. Main's family can begin the long healing process," Chafee said. "A life sentence is the appropriate punishment for this brutal crime and respects Rhode Island's longstanding opposition to the death penalty."

Chafee was a Republican-turned-independent at the time of the battle, but has since joined the Democratic Party.

One of Pleau's lawyers, Bob Mann, said they were grateful that a plea deal was reached and that Pleau no longer faces the potential of the death penalty.

A spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's office did not comment on the deal.

In the plea agreement, Pleau admits that he conspired with two others, Jose Santiago and Kelley Lajoie, both of Massachusetts, to rob Main. Pleau admits he shot Main in the head outside the bank, then made off with around \$12,000, which he split with Santiago and Lajoie.

Santiago has pleaded not guilty. Lajoie has pleaded guilty to robbery and other charges and is awaiting sentencing.