



RI man in death penalty battle sentenced to life

By Michelle R. Smith

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — A Rhode Island man at the center of a capital punishment battle between the state and federal governments was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole on Friday after changing his plea to avoid the death penalty.

[Jason Pleau](#) pleaded guilty in July in the 2010 killing of [David Main](#), a gas station manager who was walking to a bank to deposit the store's receipts — \$12,542 — when Pleau ambushed him. Main ran toward the bank and Pleau shot him in the head, then picked up the bag of money and left. He went on a shopping spree with his girlfriend later that day.

Gov. [Lincoln Chafee](#) fought unsuccessfully to keep Pleau out of federal custody because of the threat that the U.S. attorney's office might pursue capital punishment, arguing the state had rejected the death penalty. As part of Pleau's agreement to plead guilty to robbery, conspiracy and using a firearm in a violent crime, the judge agreed to sentence him to life in prison without parole.

U.S. District Judge William Smith on Friday formally imposed the sentence after hearing from prosecutors about Pleau's life of crime, as well as from Main's wife and sisters about Main's life and the impact the killing has had on them.

Main's wife, Kathy, told the court about the last time she saw her husband, early that morning as she helped him find his keys before his 6 a.m. shift started at the gas station, neither of them knowing it would be the last time they saw each other. They had just celebrated their 25th anniversary. Later that day, after learning her husband was dead, she waited for her son to return from school.

"The bus finally arrived. I had to tell our 17-year-old son that his father had been shot and killed. We walked home in shock," she said.

She said she had to cut back at work and eventually lost her job because of the grief.

Main's sister, [Deborah Main Smith](#), said in a statement read by the prosecutor that the turmoil and repeated legal challenges over the past three years had been painful for the family.

Chafee had argued state's rights during his battle to keep Pleau in state custody and away from a possible death penalty. His position drew support from the National Governor's Association, attorneys general from seven states, the conservative [Cato Institute](#) and the [American Civil Liberties Union](#). But an appeals court ruled against him and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to take up the case.

"I know that process has added to the difficulties," Judge Smith said Friday as he addressed the family. "The decision of the government to seek the death penalty. The decision of the governor to challenge the custody of the defendant."

He said those steps were part of the legal process and were not meant to add to what they were going through.

Two others who have pleaded guilty to participating in planning and carrying out the crime will be sentenced at a later date: [Jose Santiago](#) and [Kelley Lajoie](#), both of Massachusetts.

Pleau, 35, of Providence, prepared a statement to read to the court, but at the last minute asked his lawyer, [David Hoose](#), to read it, Hoose said. In it, he apologized.

"I definitely regret my actions, and even though my words may not mean much to anyone today, I hope someday my apology can be accepted," the statement said. "I can only hope that today brings them some closure and allows the opportunity to begin to heal."