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Deliberations start in murder-for-hire trial

• Defense says state lacks evidence against husband accused of paying 19-year-old to kill wife in Alliance

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CANTON: Jurors in the David Thorne murder-for-hire case began deliberations yesterday that likely will focus on the credibility of the state's lead witness, 19-year-old high school dropout Joseph Wilkes.

As part of a plea agreement to avoid a death penalty trial, Wilkes testified that Thorne hired him to slash 26-year-old Yvonne Layne's throat in her Alliance home on

March 31. Thorne's attorneys argued that Wilkes told police what they wanted to hear and lied about Thorne's involvement because he believed Thorne already had implicated him in the murder.

Wilkes was sentenced to at least 30 years in prison without possibility of parole.

Prosecutors said Wilkes had no motive to kill Layne, a woman he barely knew, other than to please the man whose respect and friend-

ship he craved.

"There is absolutely no connection between Joseph Wilkes and Yvonne Layne except for David Thorne," said Chryssa Hartnett, assistant Stark County prosecutor.

Thorne, 27, is accused of conspiring with Wilkes to kill Layne so Thorne wouldn't have to pay child support for their 2-year-old son. That child, now 3, lives with Thorne's grandfather in Atwater.

Wilkes told jurors Thorne gave him \$100 for a motel room the night of the killing, then paid him \$200 when the job was done.

Defense attorney Jeffrey Haupt told jurors the state's expert wit-

nesses provided no scientific evidence - either from Layne's home or Thorne's car - linking Thorne to the killing.

"Did you hear anything that made you believe David Thorne was connected?" Haupt asked.

Hartnett argued that the testimony of several witnesses, especially Karen and Brent Enoch, who invited the unemployed, homeless Wilkes to live with them just days before the murder, corroborate his confession.

"He (Thorne) wanted Yvonne Layne out of the picture," Hartnett said. "He wanted her dead. That's what he told Wilkes. Not

hurt, not scared. Dead."

She said Wilkes, who looked up to Thorne like a big brother, was the perfect choice for the job. Wilkes testified that he'd beaten up somebody because Thorne asked him to.

"It makes sense that he (Wilkes) would do anything for him - it was their history," Hartnett said.

Defense attorney George Keith disputed the contention that Thorne wanted custody so badly that he was willing to kill for it, saying it didn't make sense given that Thorne had begun making payments only a few weeks before

the murder.

But Assistant Stark County Prosecutor Jonathan Baumel told jurors they shouldn't consider Thorne or Wilkes to be reasonable people with rational motivations.

"The crimes by their very nature don't make sense," Baumel said.

Stark County Common Pleas Judge Richard D. Reinbold Jr. told jurors they will be sequestered until they reach a conclusion.

Jurors deliberated about three hours yesterday and are expected to resume this morning.