

Rape-Torture

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told WLIV-AM's Imhotep Gary Byrd in New York.

"There is some justice being done," Shabazz continued. "We fought for hate crime charges, [prosecutors] resisted, saying that hate crime charges would not be filed, and through our advocacy and efforts, yes, the first hate crime charge was filed in this case."

Two days after the indictments, Karen Burton cut a plea deal with prosecutors, copping to the hate crime charge — which carried up to ten years in prison — in addition to malicious wounding and assault.

Shabazz, though somewhat leery, pointed to her admission of guilt as a modicum of justice, as well.

Karen Burton faces a maximum 30 years in prison.

The value of getting Alisha Burton and Messer's testimony against the others in preparation for trial was certainly appropriate, Shabazz says.

But the reasoning for Brewster being allowed to get off the hook, according to Shabazz, absolutely wasn't.

"There is West Virginia justice being done, which means that White criminals are allowed to do less time for harming Black people than they should," said Shabazz.

"To see a situation where [Frankie Brewster] may be eligible for parole in ten years, which she should absolutely not receive with her terrible criminal past, a manslaughter conviction, is unacceptable.

Arthur Burwell, Williams' cousin, agreed, saying that he was "appalled" that Brewster wasn't facing 25 years to life for sexual assault and kidnapping.

"They should all be in jail for the maximum," Burwell said.

"It just sounds like [prosecutors] may be letting them slide out from under it, sort of like, 'Let's appease [folks]. We've got a conviction.' But could they have gotten a conviction on a higher charge? From what I've heard, it sounds like they could," said civil rights attorney Roger Wareham on WBLN-FM in New York..

"This case is a 'hot potato,'" radio host Byrd feigned West Virginia prosecutors as saying.

"How soon can we get this thing out of our hands?" Three other suspects remain.

Bobby Brewster, 24, son

of Frankie, is charged with second-degree sexual assault, kidnapping, malicious assault, assault during the commission of a felony and conspiracy.

It was he who Logan County investigators say Williams had a "social relationship" with originally, before she filed domestic abuse charges against him last July, sending him to jail for a short period.

When Bobby was released in early August is when Williams was held captive and tortured until Sept. 8, when Logan County deputies, acting on a tip, rescued her from the broken-down mobile home trailer owned by Bobby's mother, Frankie.

Another suspect, Danny Combs, 20, is also charged with kidnapping, sexual assault and conspiracy.

A previously unknown seventh suspect was charged only with misdemeanor battery.

Given that prosecutor Abraham originally indicated that all of the indicted would stand trial separately, while it is possible he could go forward with trials against Bobby Brewster, Combs and the third suspect, it is now not likely, especially with four of their accomplices having already cut deals.

Abraham is no doubt leveraging those deals to pressure the remaining three to cave in. If he's successful, observers say, then the stark, brutal details of Williams' ordeal will never be heard by a jury in public.

Abraham has made no secret that White West Virginians, though sympathetic to Williams' plight, resented the immense pressure and negative publicity that Black activists like Shabazz and Rev. Al Sharpton put on prosecutors to pursue hate crime charges against all six original suspects.

The prosecutor shunned the negative attention the

case and, indirectly, the state was receiving.

By cutting plea deals in the Williams case, Abraham sidesteps what would be months, if not years of prosecution that would keep West Virginia in a negative spotlight.

But supporters of Williams believe true justice for one of the worst racial crimes in recent history is being sacrificed for expediency, and they don't like it.

"We believe that every single one of these defendants should have been charged with hate crime charges, and the evidence supported it," Shabazz said.

There is little doubt that support for Williams extends well beyond West Virginia.

On Feb. 16, students and faculty at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, N.Y., hosted a Black History Month benefit with an open mic session to support Williams, who attended, along with her parents and family.

Supporters raised hundreds of dollars for the family, and demanded that all of the suspects, not just Karen Burton, face hate crime charges, if not in West Virginia, then certainly on the federal level.

Shabazz agrees, but right now, he wants to make sure that all of the defendants that have pleaded guilty thus far get the maximum sentences West Virginia law allows.

"On March 3, Karen Burton and Frankie Brewster will be sentenced on that day. We will be at that courthouse. We will have the community [there], and the judge will be on notice that we want the max laid down.

"We want to see every year applied to their sentences," Shabazz said.

Later he vowed, "We intend to pack this courthouse and pack the courthouse grounds to let the judge know that we want more."

Cash Michaels writes for the Wilmington Journal.

LEGAL NOTICES

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF SOUTHERN NEVADA

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