

Mom's release depends on daughter

The freedom of a California mother jailed in relation to a drug case in Troy could hinge on the availability of her 14-year-old daughter, according to an Oakland County circuit judge.

Judge Rudy J. Nichols Wednesday postponed a decision on granting bond for Mindy R. Brass until it can be determined if her daughter can be brought to Michigan pending her mother's new trial on charges of cocaine trafficking.

Brass was arrested after two men attempted to sell a kilo of cocaine to two undercover narcotics officers at a motel in Troy in 1991. The men implicated Brass, who was subsequently found guilty of attempting to sell more than 650 grams of cocaine and sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole under Michigan's drug-lifer law.

Earlier this month, Nichols ordered a new trial for Brass because her defense attorney did not have access to a document that called into question the credibility of the main prosecution witness, William R. Leflet — one of the two men arrested in Troy.

Wednesday's hearing was on a motion from attorney Marguerite A. Hanes, who asked that Brass be released from the Scott Correctional Facility on personal bond pending the new trial. Her client is not violent, the attorney noted, and she has completed a drug program in prison.

Nichols said Brass would be a better candidate for bond if her daughter — Erika, now in a foster home in California — was in Michigan because the mother has less incentive to leave the state and be more likely to appear for her new trial on Nov. 2.

"The judge made it clear he has not made up his mind on granting her bond," said Oakland assistant prosecutor Beth M. Hand, who has asked for a cash bond of \$250,000. But the judge also made it clear he would consider bond if her daughter is in Michigan, she said.

Brass would not be able to post a cash bond, said her attorney. "She has been in prison for seven years and is totally indigent, dependent on the good will of some Oakland County residents," said Hanes.

Those residents are members of the "Justice for Mindy Committee" that has been working to get Brass released from prison. They have also been working to get her a heart transplant to replace the one seriously damaged when Brass suffered a heart attack in prison.

Following the judge's ruling, one member of that committee — Sam Gross of Beverly Hills — said he and his wife Vicki would be willing to take custody of Erika Brass until her mother's trial, providing California authorities agree.

OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to June 25.

BIRMINGHAM

Raped in? Hooper School is meeting resistance to its plans to expand the upper school building, on Adams Road, north of Maple. The private school plans to double its parking space and add an assembly hall and physical education building, but nearby neighbors are concerned about the size and scope of the project.

CLARKSTON

In the workforce: Four autistic adults, who last year became the Clarkston Community School's first to graduate with general education students, have now entered the workforce. After graduating last spring, the students have worked at a variety of local businesses. At least one has also enrolled in classes at Oakland Community College.

FARMINGTON HILLS

Brown out: Residents gave Detroit Edison representatives an careful over periodic summertime power outages in their southwest Farmington Hills neighborhoods. Residents of one subdivision reported 26 outages over the past 2 1/2 years. Edison blamed the problem on a faulty circuit.

KEEOG HARBOR

Last picture show: Keego Twin Cinemas, one of the last of the area's independently-run movie houses, is scheduled for demolition within 90 days to make way for a Rite Aid Drug Store. The theater dates back to the 1940s and had been considered a local historic site, but reportedly had been losing money for years.

LAKE ORION

Groundhog's day: An observant motorist and veterinarians at North Oaks Animal Hospital saved an injured groundhog last week. Motorist Katie Coffman saw the groundhog as it was struggling to cross Orion Road. She stopped, wrapped the bleeding animal in a T-shirt, then drove it to the hospital. Veterinarians determined the animal had suffered internal injuries and damage to its mouth and an eye, all of which were corrected via surgery. The groundhog, named Nonh John — an acronym for the hospital, coupled with the name of an employee's husband — will eventually be released to a local farm for additional healing.

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