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Sniper's court date set

By Matthew Barakat
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FAIRFAX, Va. — A judge set a Nov. 10 trial date Tuesday for 17-year-old Lee Boyd Malvo, who could face the death penalty for his alleged role in sniper attacks that terrorized Washington area.

Prosecutors had asked for a trial date in late June, while the defense had requested February 2004. Circuit Judge Jane Rouse picked a date in between, saying it allowed twice the time normally granted under Virginia law for a speedy trial.

"I am not going to be ready by Nov. 10. It's an impossible date. It's not a realistic date," defense attorney Michael A. complained.

Malvo is being tried in Fairfax County on murder charges in the Oct. 14 slaying of a Home Depot store manager. Prosecutor Robert Horan Jr. has not yet said whether he will seek the death penalty.

Malvo and John Allen Muhammad, 42, are accused of killing 13 people and wounding six in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. They are being tried first in Virginia because its laws allow the best opportunities for the death penalty.

Horan has said fingerprints from a rifle, notes to police and phone calls from Malvo link him to at least four of the sniper shootings.

Muhammad's trial in the slaying of a man at a gas station is set to begin in mid-October in neighboring Prince William County.

Foster child abused, agency looks for answers

By Herbert G. McCants
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Officials in Illinois' family-services department were scrambling Tuesday to figure out where its much-praised child-welfare system broke down in the case of a year-old boy found chained to the neck to a bedpost.

Critics said the scandal indicates the Department of Children and Family Services needs to reduce its reliance on private agencies to watch over children in foster care. One critic said it may be time to split the department into two agencies.

"They need to tear it up and do something new," Cook County Public Guardian Patrick Murphy said. "They are using a model that was developed in the 1800s and hasn't been changed since."

In 2000, DCFS became the second state child welfare agency in the country to win national accreditation from the New York-based Accreditation for Children and Family Services. At the time, David Lieberman of the accrediting group declared: "Illinois is setting the pattern for the rest of the country."

But a drug raid Saturday at a South Side Chicago home led to the discovery of a foster child chained to a bed. The child was wrapped around his neck and held in place with a padlock. The boy wore a soiled diaper wrapped in a plastic bag.

According to police, the boy's foster mother, Mary Bryant, 64, said he was chained because he stole food.

Bryant and the boy's foster father, Melvin Bond, 49, were charged with child endangerment. Melinda Bryant, 29, Mary Bryant's daughter, was charged with child endangerment as well as weapon and drug offenses.

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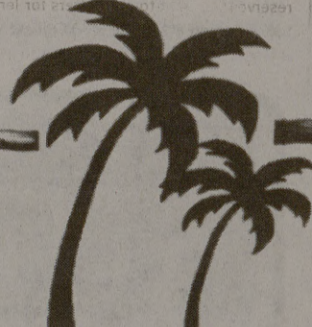
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