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Friday, May 7, 2004

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reg Abbott told a Senate committee Thursday hat the state's insanity standard needs to be he percent formed, citing the case of a Beaumont man etailers' salet harged with murder for placing a 6-year-old in onth last year.

"Our current laws in how we deal with the riminally insane have failed," Abbott said. "A life 4.4% as needlessly lost because of the way our system 5.3% orks or perhaps didn't work."

5.0% Kenneth Pierott was found not guilty by reason finsanity in 1998 for using a dumbbell to fatally 2.0% at his 25-year-old sister, who suf-

4.9% ered from cerebral palsy. He was 3.0% eased after four months in a state 1.0%

"Last month, Mr. Pierott put his 7.6% infriend's 6-year-old son in the oven, nent 5.4% med the heat up to 600 degrees and eft the boy to die," Abbott said.

> The pilot light wasn't on in the ven so it didn't heat, but the child ed of asphyxiation.

-1.8% Abbott also pointed to the case of ast Texas mother Deanna Laney, ho was found not guilty by reason finsanity in the stoning deaths of o of her sons. A judge has comnitted her to a state hospital at least

Tombstone of

found desecrated

JASPER, Texas (AP) - The

ravesite of a black man who was

tragged to death in 1998 by

three white men was found dese-

A racial epithet was carved

into the broken tombstone of

Jasper Police Chief Stanley

hristopher told Beaumont televi-

on station KFDM that that the

rated Thursday, police said.

Jasper man

James Byrd Jr.

eet expected "The public is justifiably suspect about a system at allows an insane killer to go free," Abbott said. with a Changes must be made to existing laws ... What e need is a system that allows the state to continanalysts ha to supervise dangerous, mentally ill criminals." cent increase Dr. Mary Alice Conroy, speaking on behalf mentally ill inmates.

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas Attorney General of the Texas Psychological Association, said cases such as Pierott's aren't the norm. She said about two-thirds of defendants found innocent by reason of insanity have not committed a violent crime.

James Smith, chief executive officer of the North Texas State Hospital, which cares for those acquitted based on insanity, said the Legislature needs to address what happens to the acquitted once they leave the hospital.

"My experience has been that it is possible to lose track of them fairly quickly," he said.

Sen. Jeff Wentworth, R-San Antonio, said Smith's observation is less than comforting. Wentworth's Jurisprudence Committee is reviewing the state's insanity statute and the issues surrounding it.

Smith would like to see the state move toward allowing a person acquitted based on insanity to be recommitted if they fail to follow certain conditions of their release, such as taking their medication.

"With that type of setup, some - Greg Abbott of the situations that break all of our hearts would not have occurred," he said.

As of Tuesday, Smith said 67 people being cared for at state hospitals had been acquitted by reason of insanity.

While some at the public hearing called for the verdict to be changed to "guilty but insane" or "guilty except mentally ill," Smith said there is a system in place in the state's prisons to deal with

NEWS IN BRIEF

case is being investigated as criminal mischief.

So far no arrests, Christopher

Three white men were convicted for Byrd's gruesome death. Two were sent to Texas death row, while the third received a life prison term.

The victim's mother, Stella Byrd, said the family was upset that the gravesite had been disturbed.

"I don't know what to think about it," Mrs. Byrd said. "They've done enough to him already. I don't think it's kids who did this. It's upsetting. We hoped he could rest in peace."

Two people who were at the Jasper City Cemetery on Thursday afternoon, tending to a relative's gravesite, noticed the damage, police said.

The desecration apparently happened in the past couple of days, according to Christopher.

The granite headstone, putting Byrd's date of birth as May 2, 1949, was broken from its base, according to KFDM.

Jasper is about 110 miles northeast of Houston.

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