

State's Attorney will seek death penalty for Flowers

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Beadle County State's Attorney Mike Moore has filed a notice of intent to seek the death penalty in the murder case against Shannon G. Flowers of Huron, accused in the February deaths of Brittney Chua and her unborn baby girl.

Flowers, 43, is charged with two counts of first-degree murder. An alternative felony count charges him with fetal homicide in that he allegedly knew or reasonably should have known that Chua was pregnant.

It will be the first death penalty case in Beadle County in nearly 30 years.

Moore said he filed a notice of intent with the clerk of courts. The defendant has been notified.

If Flowers is convicted of either or both murder charges, the state will ask the jury to then decide whether he should receive the death penalty or life in prison. It must be a unanimous decision.

After reviewing the case, Moore said it meets aggravating circumstances due to the nature of the crime and the fact that a child was killed.

"It met the factors," he said.

At a March news conference, Moore said Chua was 16 to 20 weeks pregnant at the time of her death. The cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head. Autopsy results indicated the victim had received numerous blows to the head. Her body was hidden in the city's compost site east of town.

A jury trial is not likely to begin until after the first of the year.

In a 1982 case, Steve Bittner of Huron was convicted of stabbing two police officers who were responding to an early morning domestic disturbance call in southeast Huron.

Sgt. Tom Callies died from his injuries while Officer Andrew Larson survived.

Judge Mark Barnett, then an assistant attorney general, asked jurors to sentence Bittner to death.

Instead, they sentenced the defendant to life in prison.

The trial had been moved to Watertown on a change of venue motion.