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No leniency for teen robber despite family's pleas

By [Diana Hefley](#), Herald Writer

EVERETT — The 13-year-old boy said he had a plan to mow lawns to pay back the two people he robbed at gunpoint last year.

“I will never do something like this again,” he vowed.

His earnest promise wasn't enough to convince a judge to send him home after five months of being locked up at Denney Juvenile Justice Center. Instead, Snohomish County Superior Court Judge Ellen Fair on Tuesday ordered him held for at least four years in a state juvenile detention center.

The teen admitted to committing a [pair of armed robberies](#) within days of each other, including a hold-up at an Everett bikini espresso stand. He was 12 at the time.

The Herald is not naming the boy because he is a juvenile.

Fair declined to grant the defense's request to release the boy to his parents.

Seattle defense attorney Michele Shaw proposed a plan that amounted to two years of house arrest and included mandatory counseling for the teen and his parents. Shaw said any community safety concerns would be addressed by around-the-clock supervision of the teen, alarms on the doors at the family home and GPS monitoring to track the boy's whereabouts at all times.

Shaw argued that the boy is in a critical stage of development and he would be better served being surrounded by his family and attending counseling sessions through Catholic Community Services.

His parents already have begun counseling, Shaw said. They also have the support of extended family and their community, she said.

Sending him to juvenile detention is sending the message “that we're giving up on him,” Shaw said.

The teen's parents apologized to the court for their son's actions. His father, speaking through an interpreter, also apologized to President Barack Obama, the governor, state and city. He thanked the “American people for their niceness.” The family is Ukrainian.

The boy's father asked the judge to show his son mercy. He asked to be allowed to parent his child through the boy's final years of childhood so he could show his “gratitude to the American people.”

The teen's mother explained that they hadn't sought counseling in the past because of the stigma in

their culture attached to people who seek mental health treatment. She is learning now how to address her son's problems, to set boundaries and to deal with his anger, the woman said.

"We failed our son and community by not making sure he got the help he needed," she said. "We will not make that mistake again."

Snohomish County deputy prosecutor Julie Walters and probation counselor Mike Little argued against setting the boy free without more time in juvenile lock-up. The boy began acting out years ago, including being suspended from school in the second grade, setting fires at school, bullying classmates and threatening a teacher, Walters said.

"He is a danger right now," she said.

In September, the boy rode his bicycle to the Hillbilly Hotties on Hoyt Avenue. He ordered a drink and pulled out a handgun, police reports said. He threatened to shoot the barista in the leg. The boy dumped about \$13 from the tip jar into his backpack and pedaled off. Just days earlier he'd robbed the Pecks Drive Market in south Everett, also while armed with a handgun.

The victim in that robbery was a man that the boy had known for years. The man had been kind to the child, talking to him about the Bible, the court was told.

The boy explained Tuesday that a 16-year-old, whom he met in church, lent him the gun, gave him drugs and told him to commit the robberies. He said the older boy assured him he wouldn't get in trouble. He said he was under the influence of drugs when he robbed the businesses.

The [older boy was sentenced in November](#) to at least two years in juvenile detention for a separate armed robbery at an Everett sandwich shop.

Shaw told the judge that younger boy was hanging out with the 16-year-old because he didn't have any other friends. His family reported that the boy had been bullied at school because of his weight. An evaluation also found that the boy was easily influenced because he wanted to be liked and accepted, the court was told.

Fair commended the boy's parents for seeking counseling. The judge, however, said that sending the boy to juvenile detention was a more realistic way to keep the community safe while getting the teen help. Fair said she didn't see how "prison at home" could work for two years.

The middle-schooler wept and hung his head after the judge announced her sentence.

"I'm certainly not giving up on you and don't you dare give up on yourself," Fair said.

The boy's sobs filled the silent courtroom as he was ushered out.

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