



Everything Michigan

Long legal battle expected in case against suspected Flint serial stabber Elias Abuelazam

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David Harris | Flint Journal

 Elias Abuelazam Processed

Tyler Sutherland | The Flint Journal

Elias Abuelazam is escorted to the finger printing station as inmates waiting to be processed press against the windows at Genesee County Jail on August 26, 2010.

Staff writer Laura Misjak contributed to this report

FLINT, Michigan — After waiting two weeks to get suspected serial stabber **Elias Abuelazam** back in Michigan, it could take prosecutors far longer to get him to trial.

Court proceedings could “take a year, easily,” said Brian Morley, one of Abuelazam’s attorneys.

Although he suspected in a series of 18 stabbings in three states, killing five in Genesee County — Abuelazam still has only been officially charged in one attack.


Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said “a backlog” of evidence at the Michigan State Police crime lab is holding up prosecutors from getting the evidence they need to further charge Abuelazam.

Charges will come, he said, “**in the not so distant future.**”

Leyton said there is one homicide in particular that he is looking to charge Abuelazam with first, but Leyton declined to specify which one or why it was being targeted.

No matter how long prosecution takes, Leyton is confident of success.

“We got the guy that is responsible for these crimes,” said Leyton. “I believe he is not sick, he is evil.”

 Suspected serial stabber Elias Abuelazam arraigned

Ryan Garza | The Flint Journal

Defense attorneys Edwar Zeineh (right) listens as suspected serial stabber Elias Abuelazam is seen on a video screen during his arraignment in Judge Nathaniel Perry III's court on Thursday.

Abuelazam, 33, **denied being involved in any stabbings** as he was transported from a Flint police van to the Genesee County Jail.

“I didn’t do anything,” Abuelazam said, responding to a reporter’s question.

Sporting a bullet-proof vest, white T-shirt, blue shorts, socks and jail-issued sandals, Abuelazam stared at the ground as he was escorted from the plane to a waiting Flint Police van.

A chain wrapped around his waist, his wrists and ankles were shackled.

Flint and Michigan State Police transported Abuelazam to the Genesee County Jail, where a crowd of inmates crowded around windows to get a glimpse of him.

Sheriff Robert Pickell said he had an **“animated” conversation** with the 6-foot-5-inch, 280-pound man.

“He had kind of a smirk on his face,” Pickell said. “He told me he was nervous about all the cameras and I told him, ‘You better get used to it, because that’s how it’s going to be.’”

Leyton said he will work with authorities in Virginia, who believe Abuelazam could also be responsible for a 2009 homicide there, but that he is focused most on justice for the victims in Genesee County.

“I have 14 victims, five of whom have died,” he said. “I want to make sure we have justice. (This case) is really all about the victims. They have to know that we care and we do.”

He also is suspected of three stabbings in Virginia and one in Ohio, none of which were fatal.

The case sparked a nationwide manhunt for the killer, who lured his victims close by asking for directions, usually attacking black men in the dead of night.



Ryan Garza/The Flint Journal

Suspected serial stabber Elias Abuelazam is escorted off a plane after landing at Bishop Airport in Flint on Thursday to be transported to the Genesee County Jail. Two Michigan State Police cruisers are escorting the van.

National, state and local media packed Flint District Court to see him arraigned Thursday afternoon — less than three hours after returning to Michigan — on a charge of assault with intent to murder for the July 27 stabbing of Antwoine Marshall, 26.

District Judge Nathaniel Perry III read aloud the charge to Abuelazam, **who appeared on a video screen with a shaved head and a beard**. Perry asked Abuelazam if he understood the charge and Abuelazam said he did with little emotion on his face.

Leyton asked that a bond of \$10 million be set, but Perry said there would be no bond because of the seriousness of the charges.

Morley and co-counsel Edwar Zeineh briefly met with their client before the arraignment.

"It's very serious and he understands it's serious," Morley said.

Morley characterized his meeting as "not a substantive conversation." Morley will review police reports and other documents to defend his client.

E'twan Wilson, 17, of Flint, who said he was the victim in the Aug. 1 stabbing on Cloverlawn near Pierson, said he hopes to testify against Abuelazam.

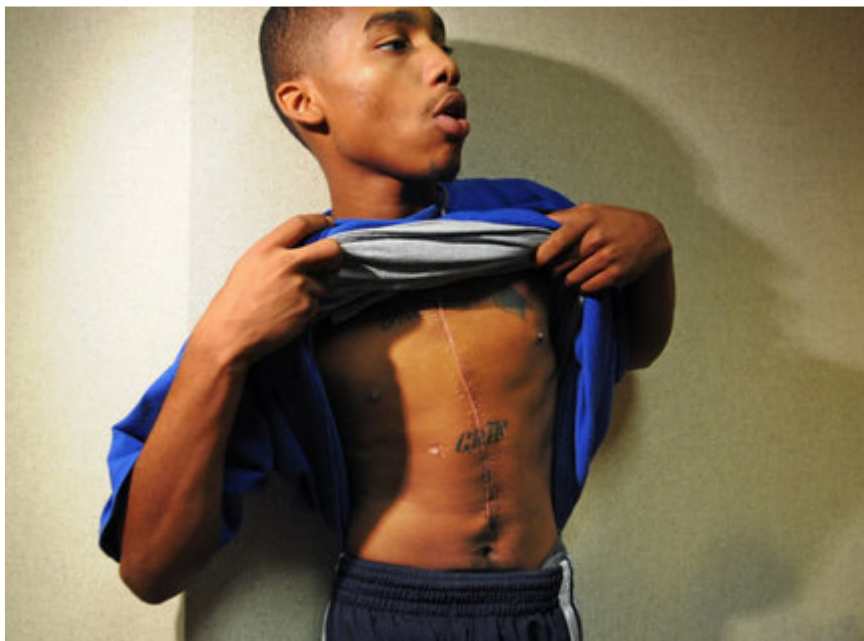
"It's something I have to do," he said. "The victims that died, they didn't have that chance."

Wilson **went to district court Thursday** hoping to see Abuelazam in person, but left disappointed because the 33-year-old suspect appeared only on a television screen, on a live video feed from the county jail.

"I wanted to see him and I wanted him to see me," Wilson said.

Like most of the attacks, Wilson was stabbed after a man stopped him to ask for directions. The vast majority of attacks linked to the serial killer were on black men, although officials have said they do not believe the stabbings were racially motivated.

"I turned away from him and he started attacking," said Wilson, who has a long scar down his chest.



Ryan Garza/The Flint Journal

E'twan Wilson, 17, of Flint, shows off his scars that he claims are from the suspected serial stabber Elias Abuelazam to the media after his arraignment in Judge Nathaniel Perry III's court on Thursday.

Wilson said he is "slowly but surely" recovering.

Abuelazam will stay in **cell No. 7 on the fifth floor, one of 30 solitary confinement cells** in the jail, and will be checked on every 15 minutes by guards, Pickell said.

He will be locked in his 8-foot by 13-foot jail cell for 23 hours a day, with one hour to speak to his attorney, see a doctor or stretch his legs in the open space between the solitary confinement cells.

Abuelazam is being kept in solitary confinement for his own safety, Pickell said.

“He’s scarred a lot of lives,” Pickell said. “There’s a lot of dislike and animosity in Flint and Genesee County.”

Abuelazam will next appear at a pre-trial hearing at 8:30 a.m. Aug. 31.

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