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Jury finds woman insane when she killed newborn daughter

A jury Friday found that a young Pacoima woman was legally insane at the time she suffocated her newborn daughter.

The Los Angeles Superior Court panel was the second jury asked to consider whether Jeanne Ma, now 23, was sane or insane when she killed her newborn daughter, who was born at home on Nov. 10, 2004.

The first jury to hear the case convicted Ma of second-degree murder and assault on a child causing death, but deadlocked 6-6 in March 2008 on whether she was sane or insane at the time.

"I'm relieved and I think they did the right thing," defense attorney Alan Eisner said after jurors found his client to have been legally insane at the time of the killing.

Ma is due back at the downtown Los Angeles courthouse on Aug. 31, when she is expected to be ordered to be sent to Patton State Hospital.

"I think this was a case of temporary insanity, not prolonged or chronic, but was brought on by a convergence of factors ...," Eisner said. "I'm hoping that we'll be able to get her to be released as soon as the process allows."

He noted, however, that it "could take years" for her to be freed.

Ma has been jailed since her Nov. 11, 2004, arrest.

During the first trial, Ma's attorney told jurors that three mental health experts concluded that his client — then an 18-year-old student at Grant High School — "had a break from reality."

He said the defense's position was that Ma — who had emigrated from the Philippines two years earlier — suffered from acute stress disorder at the time she gave birth and did not want to reveal "these demons that she had" and "be labeled crazy" if she revealed hearing voices.

Deputy District Attorney Ronda Brody countered during the first trial that Ma specifically denied hearing voices in interviews within a few days after her baby's death, and that it wasn't until about six months later that the young woman spoke of hearing voices.

"Of course, she has the motivation to lie ... She wants to beat a murder charge," the prosecutor told the first jury.

Ma had faced a potential life prison sentence if jurors had found that she was sane at the time of the crime.