

Man charged in Ashanti Billie's death won't stand trial, judge rules

BY JANE HARPER
AND SALEEN MARTIN
Staff writers

A Navy veteran charged in the September 2017 death of 19-year-old Ashanti Billie will not stand trial due to mental incompetency, a judge ruled Tuesday.

U.S. District Judge Raymond Jackson also determined that Eric Brian Brown's competency can't be restored, according to a defense attorney on the case.

The ruling came during a Zoom conference held between the judge, prosecutors and defense lawyers, attorney Andrew Protogyrou said. The prosecution did not object to the finding, he said.

Tuesday's decision does not mean the criminal charges against Brown have been dismissed or that he'll be released.

Prosecutors said they'll seek to have him civilly committed during proceedings expected to be heard



VIRGINIAN-PILOT FILE

Eric Brian Brown leaves federal court in Norfolk after being charged Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2017, with the kidnapping and murder of 19-year-old Ashanti Billie.

in North Carolina, where he's being held in a federal prison medical facility. If successful, Brown likely would be involuntarily committed to a mental health facility.

"The indictment against Brown remains in effect," a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Nor-

folk said in a brief statement. "If he becomes competent in the future, we intend to proceed with his prosecution."

According to a court document filed by the defense earlier this month, the prison's chief psychiatrist and mental health experts for the prosecution and defense all agreed that his mental illness is too severe to restore him to competency. To stand trial, a defendant must be able to understand the charges they face, as well as assist in their own defense.

Brown — who suffers from schizophrenia — was arrested in November 2017, about two months after Billie disappeared from a sandwich shop on Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek.

Brown, 48, was a regular customer of the recently opened business. Billie worked there part-time while also going to school at The

See BILLIE/Page 17

where
ed one
ake plaque.