

State to pay experts

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to defend slaying suspect

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MILFORD — In an unusual move Wednesday, a judge granted a private defense attorney's request to have the state pay for expert witnesses in a West Haven woman's murder case.

Attorney Tara Knight of New Haven filed a motion for payment of necessary expenses in Superior Court, asking the state Judicial Department, or taxpayers, to pay for any expert witness evaluation or testimony for Charissa Willette, 18, whose

family is indigent.

Willette was charged with murder last April after she allegedly stabbed her live-in boyfriend, Kevin Finch, in their trailer on Jones Hill Road. Her parents used all "available resources" to post a \$150,000 bond to get Willette out of jail and paid for Knight's fees, according to the motion filed in court.

Since then, Willette's father has become disabled and is not working, according to the motion.

Willette and her mother are also unemployed.

In order to build her case, Knight said

she could need psychiatrists and experts on blood stain evidence. But she said she is still unsure who she will need.

"It's always been our position that she [Willette] did not intend to kill this boy," Knight said. "This is not murder."

Judge Bruce Thompson granted the request Wednesday.

Knight said the request is not rare and she has seen it done several times in New Haven court, particularly if there is a mistrial and all the family's money pays for the first case.

However, State's Attorney Mary M.

Galvin, the prosecutor in the case, said she does not recall a case in which a private attorney requested such a motion in the Ansonia-Milford court district.

"I can't think of one here," said Galvin, who has been a prosecutor for about 20 years.

According to the court fee schedule for temporary contractual services, psychiatrists who testify in competency trials are paid \$150 for an examination/report and \$125 for court testimony plus \$25 for each hour spent in court beyond two hours. Psychologists could cost roughly \$173 for an

evaluation, including \$107 for a personality diagnosis.

In August, Thompson ruled that probable cause exists to charge Willette with murder after testimony revealed she followed her 24-year-old boyfriend into a bedroom and stabbed him in the chest with an 8-inch kitchen knife.

Knight claimed Willette never intended to kill him and only wanted to fend off Finch, who was abusive.

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