



Ohio Revised Code

Section 2929.03 Imposition of sentence for aggravated murder.

Effective: April 12, 2021

Legislation: Senate Bill 256, House Bill 136 - 133rd General Assembly

(A) If the indictment or count in the indictment charging aggravated murder does not contain one or more specifications of aggravating circumstances listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, then, following a verdict of guilty of the charge of aggravated murder, the trial court shall impose sentence on the offender as follows:

(1) Except as provided in division (A)(2) or (H) of this section, the trial court shall impose one of the following sentences on the offender:

(a) Life imprisonment without parole;

(b) Subject to division (A)(1)(e) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty years of imprisonment;

(c) Subject to division (A)(1)(e) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment;

(d) Subject to division (A)(1)(e) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment;

(e) If the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information charging the offense, and the trial court does not impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on the offender pursuant to division (A)(1)(a) of this section, the trial court shall sentence the offender pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code to an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment that shall be served pursuant to that section.

(2) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a



sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, the trial court shall impose upon the offender a sentence of life imprisonment without parole that shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised Code.

(B) If the indictment or count in the indictment charging aggravated murder contains one or more specifications of aggravating circumstances listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, the verdict shall separately state whether the accused is found guilty or not guilty of the principal charge and, if guilty of the principal charge, whether the offender was eighteen years of age or older at the time of the commission of the offense, if the matter of age was raised by the offender pursuant to section 2929.023 of the Revised Code, and whether the offender is guilty or not guilty of each specification. The jury shall be instructed on its duties in this regard. The instruction to the jury shall include an instruction that a specification shall be proved beyond a reasonable doubt in order to support a guilty verdict on the specification, but the instruction shall not mention the penalty that may be the consequence of a guilty or not guilty verdict on any charge or specification.

(C)(1) If the indictment or count in the indictment charging aggravated murder contains one or more specifications of aggravating circumstances listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, then, following a verdict of guilty of the charge but not guilty of each of the specifications, and regardless of whether the offender raised the matter of age pursuant to section 2929.023 of the Revised Code or the matter of serious mental illness at the time of the commission of the offense pursuant to section 2929.025 of the Revised Code, the trial court shall impose sentence on the offender as follows:

(a) Except as provided in division (C)(1)(b) or (H) of this section, the trial court shall impose one of the following sentences on the offender:

(i) Life imprisonment without parole;

(ii) Subject to division (C)(1)(a)(v) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty years of imprisonment;

(iii) Subject to division (C)(1)(a)(v) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after



serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment;

(iv) Subject to division (C)(1)(a)(v) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment;

(v) If the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information charging the offense, and the trial court does not impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on the offender pursuant to division (C)(1)(a)(i) of this section, the trial court shall sentence the offender pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code to an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment.

(b) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, the trial court shall impose upon the offender a sentence of life imprisonment without parole that shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised Code.

(2)(a) If the indictment or count in the indictment contains one or more specifications of aggravating circumstances listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code and if the offender is found guilty of both the charge and one or more of the specifications, the penalty to be imposed on the offender shall be one of the following:

(i) Except as provided in division (C)(2)(a)(ii), (C)(2)(a)(iii), or (H) and subject to divisions (D)(1) and (E) of this section, the penalty to be imposed on the offender shall be death, life imprisonment without parole, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment, or life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment.

(ii) Except as provided in division (C)(2)(a)(iii) or (H) of this section, if the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or



information charging the offense, and the trial court does not impose a sentence of death or life imprisonment without parole on the offender pursuant to division (C)(2)(a)(i) of this section, the penalty to be imposed on the offender shall be an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment that shall be imposed pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code and served pursuant to that section.

(iii) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, the penalty to be imposed on the offender shall be death or life imprisonment without parole that shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised Code.

(b) A penalty imposed pursuant to division (C)(2)(a)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this section shall be determined pursuant to divisions (D) and (E) of this section and shall be determined by one of the following:

(i) By the panel of three judges that tried the offender upon the offender's waiver of the right to trial by jury;

(ii) By the trial jury and the trial judge, if the offender was tried by jury.

(D)(1) Death may not be imposed as a penalty for aggravated murder if the offender raised the matter of age at trial pursuant to section 2929.023 of the Revised Code and was not found at trial to have been eighteen years of age or older at the time of the commission of the offense or raised the matter of the offender's serious mental illness at the time of the commission of the offense pursuant to section 2929.025 of the Revised Code and was found under that section to be ineligible for a sentence of death due to serious mental illness. When death may be imposed as a penalty for aggravated murder, the court shall proceed under this division. When death may be imposed as a penalty, the court, upon the request of the defendant, shall require a pre-sentence investigation to be made and, upon the request of the defendant, shall require a mental examination to be made, and shall require reports of the investigation and of any mental examination submitted to the court, pursuant to section 2947.06 of the Revised Code. No statement made or information provided by a defendant in a mental examination or proceeding conducted pursuant to this division shall be



disclosed to any person, except as provided in this division, or be used in evidence against the defendant on the issue of guilt in any retrial. A pre-sentence investigation or mental examination shall not be made except upon request of the defendant. Copies of any reports prepared under this division shall be furnished to the court, to the trial jury if the offender was tried by a jury, to the prosecutor, and to the offender or the offender's counsel for use under this division. The court, and the trial jury if the offender was tried by a jury, shall consider any report prepared pursuant to this division and furnished to it and any evidence raised at trial that is relevant to the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing or to any factors in mitigation of the imposition of the sentence of death, shall hear testimony and other evidence that is relevant to the nature and circumstances of the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing, the mitigating factors set forth in division (B) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, and any other factors in mitigation of the imposition of the sentence of death, and shall hear the statement, if any, of the offender, and the arguments, if any, of counsel for the defense and prosecution, that are relevant to the penalty that should be imposed on the offender. The defendant shall be given great latitude in the presentation of evidence of the mitigating factors set forth in division (B) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code and of any other factors in mitigation of the imposition of the sentence of death. If the offender chooses to make a statement, the offender is subject to cross-examination only if the offender consents to make the statement under oath or affirmation.

The defendant shall have the burden of going forward with the evidence of any factors in mitigation of the imposition of the sentence of death. The prosecution shall have the burden of proving, by proof beyond a reasonable doubt, that the aggravating circumstances the defendant was found guilty of committing are sufficient to outweigh the factors in mitigation of the imposition of the sentence of death.

(2) Upon consideration of the relevant evidence raised at trial, the testimony, other evidence, statement of the offender, arguments of counsel, and, if applicable, the reports submitted pursuant to division (D)(1) of this section, the trial jury, if the offender was tried by a jury, shall determine whether the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing are sufficient to outweigh the mitigating factors present in the case. If the trial jury unanimously finds, by proof beyond a reasonable doubt, that the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing outweigh the mitigating factors, the trial jury shall recommend to the court that the



sentence of death be imposed on the offender. Absent such a finding, the jury shall recommend that the offender be sentenced to one of the following:

(a) Except as provided in division (D)(2)(b), (D)(2)(c) or (H) of this section, to life imprisonment without parole, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment, or life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment;

(b) Except as provided in division (D)(2)(c) or (H) of this section, if the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information charging the offense, and the jury does not recommend a sentence of life imprisonment without parole pursuant to division (D)(2)(a) of this section, to an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment to be imposed pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code and served pursuant to that section.

(c) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, to life imprisonment without parole.

If the trial jury recommends that the offender be sentenced to life imprisonment without parole, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment, or an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment to be imposed pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code, except as provided in division (H) of this section, the court shall impose the sentence recommended by the jury upon the offender. If the sentence is an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment imposed as described in division (D)(2)(b) of this section or a sentence of life imprisonment without parole imposed under division (D)(2)(c) of this section, the sentence shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised Code. If the trial jury recommends that the sentence of death be imposed upon the offender, the court shall proceed to impose sentence pursuant to division (D)(3) of this section.



(3) Upon consideration of the relevant evidence raised at trial, the testimony, other evidence, statement of the offender, arguments of counsel, and, if applicable, the reports submitted to the court pursuant to division (D)(1) of this section, if, after receiving pursuant to division (D)(2) of this section the trial jury's recommendation that the sentence of death be imposed, the court finds, by proof beyond a reasonable doubt, or if the panel of three judges unanimously finds, by proof beyond a reasonable doubt, that the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing outweigh the mitigating factors, it shall impose sentence of death on the offender. Absent such a finding by the court or panel, the court or the panel shall impose one of the following sentences on the offender:

(a) Except as provided in division (D)(3)(b) or (H) of this section, one of the following:

(i) Life imprisonment without parole;

(ii) Subject to division (D)(3)(a)(iv) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment;

(iii) Subject to division (D)(3)(a)(iv) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment;

(iv) If the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information charging the offense, and the trial court does not impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on the offender pursuant to division (D)(3)(a)(i) of this section, the court or panel shall sentence the offender pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code to an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment.

(b) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, life imprisonment without parole that shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised



Code.

(E)(1) If the offender raised the matter of age at trial pursuant to section 2929.023 of the Revised Code, was convicted of aggravated murder and one or more specifications of an aggravating circumstance listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, and was not found at trial to have been eighteen years of age or older at the time of the commission of the offense, the court or the panel of three judges shall not impose a sentence of death on the offender. Instead, the court or panel shall impose one of the following sentences on the offender:

(a) Except as provided in division (E)(1)(b) or (H) of this section, one of the following:

(i) Life imprisonment without parole;

(ii) Subject to division (E)(1)(a)(iv) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving twenty-five full years of imprisonment;

(iii) Subject to division (E)(1)(a)(iv) of this section, life imprisonment with parole eligibility after serving thirty full years of imprisonment;

(iv) If the victim of the aggravated murder was less than thirteen years of age, the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification that was included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information charging the offense, and the trial court does not impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on the offender pursuant to division (E)(1)(a)(i) of this section, the court or panel shall sentence the offender pursuant to division (B)(3) of section 2971.03 of the Revised Code to an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment.

(b) If the offender also is convicted of or pleads guilty to a sexual motivation specification and a sexually violent predator specification that are included in the indictment, count in the indictment, or information that charged the aggravated murder, except as provided in division (H) of this section, life imprisonment without parole that shall be served pursuant to section 2971.03 of the Revised Code.



(2) If the offender raised the matter of the offender's serious mental illness at the time of the commission of the offense pursuant to section 2929.025 of the Revised Code, was found under that section to be ineligible for a sentence of death due to serious mental illness, and was convicted of aggravated murder and one or more specifications of an aggravating circumstance listed in division (A) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, the court or panel of three judges shall not impose a sentence of death on the offender. Instead, the court or panel shall sentence the offender to life imprisonment without parole.

(F) The court or the panel of three judges, when it imposes sentence of death, shall state in a separate opinion its specific findings as to the existence of any of the mitigating factors set forth in division (B) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code, the existence of any other mitigating factors, the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing, and the reasons why the aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing were sufficient to outweigh the mitigating factors. The court or panel, when it imposes life imprisonment or an indefinite term consisting of a minimum term of thirty years and a maximum term of life imprisonment under division (D) of this section, shall state in a separate opinion its specific findings of which of the mitigating factors set forth in division (B) of section 2929.04 of the Revised Code it found to exist, what other mitigating factors it found to exist, what aggravating circumstances the offender was found guilty of committing, and why it could not find that these aggravating circumstances were sufficient to outweigh the mitigating factors. For cases in which a sentence of death is imposed for an offense committed before January 1, 1995, the court or panel shall file the opinion required to be prepared by this division with the clerk of the appropriate court of appeals and with the clerk of the supreme court within fifteen days after the court or panel imposes sentence. For cases in which a sentence of death is imposed for an offense committed on or after January 1, 1995, the court or panel shall file the opinion required to be prepared by this division with the clerk of the supreme court within fifteen days after the court or panel imposes sentence. The judgment in a case in which a sentencing hearing is held pursuant to this section is not final until the opinion is filed.

(G)(1) Whenever the court or a panel of three judges imposes a sentence of death for an offense committed before January 1, 1995, the clerk of the court in which the judgment is rendered shall make and retain a copy of the entire record in the case, and shall deliver the original of the entire record in the case to the appellate court.



(2) Whenever the court or a panel of three judges imposes a sentence of death for an offense committed on or after January 1, 1995, the clerk of the court in which the judgment is rendered shall make and retain a copy of the entire record in the case, and shall deliver the original of the entire record in the case to the supreme court.

(H) A court shall not impose a sentence of life imprisonment without parole on a person under division (A)(1) or (2), (C)(1) or (2), (D)(2) or (3), or (E)(1) or (2) of this section for an offense that was committed when the person was under eighteen years of age.

The Legislative Service Commission presents the text of this section as a composite of the section as amended by multiple acts of the General Assembly. This presentation recognizes the principle stated in R.C. 1.52(B) that amendments are to be harmonized if reasonably capable of simultaneous operation.