

Convicted Tampa cop killer found incompetent for the 13th time

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TAMPA — Not even a judge's order forcing psychotropic medications could restore convicted cop killer Carlos Bello to competency.

Bello, 57, refused to eat after Circuit Judge Ronald Ficarrotta made his ruling in April, said prosecutor Darrell Dirks. Noticing the fluctuation in his vital signs, jail officials delayed the administration of the medications to ensure his health, Dirks said.

The convict appeared in court this week in a wheelchair, unable to recognize his family members in the audience. Two doctors deemed him incompetent, and on Thursday Ficarrotta agreed.

For the 13th time since his 1987 conviction, Bello will return to a state hospital instead of being sentenced. "He has manipulated the system since 1981," Dirks said. "He continues to manipulate the system."

On July 24, 1981, the Cuban refugee who had spent the previous decade in and out of Cuban mental hospitals shot two Tampa police detectives during a drug bust. He injured Robert Ulriksen. He killed Gerald A. Raufft.

Once in custody, Bello tried to commit suicide. He became catatonic. Doctors diagnosed him with paranoid schizophrenia and medicated him at a hospital, only to find he would stop taking his medications in jail and deteriorate — a pattern he continues to repeat.

Six years after his arrest, a jury convicted him of murdering one detective and attempting to murder another. A judge sentenced him to die in the electric chair.

But in 1989, the Florida Supreme Court threw out the sentence, partly because Bello was made to wear leg shackles in court, which could have prejudiced the jury. The court ordered that Bello be resentenced.

More than 20 years later, that's where this case remains.

Dirks says the biggest problem lies in the lag time between Bello's stints at the hospital and his sentencing hearings. He was off his meds for about a month before Ficarrotta ruled. Dirks says he will get a report about Bello in six months and once it's time for another hearing, will try to coordinate a quicker, more seamless transition.

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