



## OFFICE OF THE SAINT LOUIS COUNTY ATTORNEY

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### NEWS RELEASE

December 28, 2015

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## Forty-year prison sentence upheld in child's death

The Minnesota Court of Appeals has affirmed the 40-year prison sentence of a Duluth man who caused his 13-month-old daughter's death by suffocation, St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin said. The sentence is nearly twice as long as the presumptive sentence.

In a decision released today, the Court of Appeals ruled that the district court did not err -- as the appellant alleged -- when it identified three aggravating factors as proper grounds for the longer sentence received by Christopher Dennis Peterson. Peterson, 31, pleaded guilty in October of 2014 to the July 5, 2014 death of his daughter Layna.

The defendant admitted that he would frequently become frustrated with his daughter's crying and to stop her from fussing he would suffocate her by placing his hand over her mouth and pinching her nostrils closed. The guideline sentence was from a range of 17 years to 24 years, but Peterson admitted that his crime included aggravating factors.

St. Louis County prosecutor Jessica Fralich questioned the defendant at the plea hearing and successfully argued to the district court that there were three aggravating factors to support the longer sentence: the victim was particularly vulnerable, the offense occurred in the victim's zone of privacy, and Peterson treated the girl with particular cruelty.

The district court found that Peterson's "position of authority, superiority, confidence or trust" in relation to the victim was a fourth aggravating factor supporting the longer sentence.

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