

## Judge rules white man will stand trial for shooting Black teen Ralph Yarl, who went to wrong house

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/judge-rules-white-man-will-stand-trial-for-shooting-black-teen-ralph-yarl-who-went-to-wrong-house>

Politics Aug 31, 2023 4:46 PM EST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A Missouri judge ruled Thursday that the 84-year-old white homeowner who shot a Black teenager after he mistakenly went to the man's house must stand trial. *[AFB: Trial date set of February 18, 2025]*

Clay County Judge Louis Angles issued the ruling after hearing from several witnesses at a preliminary hearing, including Ralph Yarl, the teenager who was shot by Andrew Lester on April 13 when Yarl went to the wrong house to pick up his younger brothers.

Lester, a retired aircraft mechanic, is charged with first-degree assault and armed criminal action. He previously pleaded not guilty in the shooting that shocked the country and renewed national debates about gun policies and race in America. His next court date is an arraignment, scheduled for Sept. 20.

Yarl spoke softly as he testified that he was sent to pick up his twin siblings but had no phone — he'd lost it at school. The house he intended to go to was just blocks from his own home, but he had the street wrong.

Yarl said he rang the bell and the wait for someone to answer seemed "longer than normal," he said.

As the inner door opened, Yarl said he reached out to grab the storm door.

"I assume these are my brother's friends' parents," he said.

Instead, it was Lester who told Yarl, "Don't come here ever again," Yarl recalled. He said he was shot in the head, the impact knocking him to the ground and was then shot in the arm.

Lester's attorney, Steve Salmon, said in closing arguments that Lester was acting in self-defense, terrified by the stranger who knocked on his door as he settled into bed for the night.

"With his age and physical infirmity, he is unable to defend himself," Salmon said, describing Lester as distraught after the shooting.

"A terrible event occurred, but it is not criminal," Salmon said.

District Attorney Zachary Thompson said that although Missouri law offers protections for people defending themselves, “You do not have the right to shoot an unarmed kid through a door.”

Kansas City Officer Larry Dunaway described Lester as “an elderly guy who was scared” after the shooting. Another officer, James Gale, said Lester was clearly worried.

“He said he hoped he didn’t kill anybody,” Gale testified.

A handful of people wearing shirts that said “Justice for Ralph” were in the courtroom. Others wore shirts that read: “Ring a doorbell is not a crime.”

Yarl continues to heal from the traumatic brain injury he suffered but was able to complete an engineering internship this summer and just started his senior year in high school. The 17-year-old is planning to major in engineering when he graduates, with several college visits planned for the fall.

Yarl was supposed to pick up his younger brothers but went to the wrong block and mistakenly ended up at Lester’s house. Lester told authorities that he shot Yarl through the door without warning because he was “scared to death” he was about to be robbed.

Initially turned away while seeking help at neighboring homes, Yarl stumbled to the street. Neighbor Carol Conrad testified that she was offering words of comfort through her window — a dispatcher had warned that neighbors should stay inside. At one point, he yelled, “I’ve been shot.”

When Yarl crumpled to the ground, three neighbors rushed to help. Jodi Dovel testified that there was a trail of blood, which pooled under his head. But Yarl was able to talk, telling her he went to ring the doorbell and was shot.

“I thought. ‘Oh no, he went to the wrong house,’” Dovel said.

Lester also called 911. On the recoding played in court he could be heard telling a dispatcher, “I shot him. He was at my door trying to get in and I shot him.”

Missouri is one of about 30 states with “stand your ground” laws allow people to respond with physical force when they are threatened. Salmon has said in earlier court filings that he planned to argue that Lester acted in self-defense.

Salmon has said that Lester’s home was egged and spray-painted after the shooting. He said Lester has sought law enforcement assistance when traveling, and his wife had to be moved from her nursing home.

Support for Yarl and his family poured in over the past few months. A GoFundMe set up on the family's behalf raised nearly \$3.5 million.