



## Judge: Couple to stay apart

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STOCKTON - A married couple accused of murder must be kept separate as legal proceedings against them continue, a San Joaquin Superior Court judge ruled Monday, upholding an earlier decision by sheriff's officials.

Judge Bernard Garber had already decided that Tracy residents Robert and Jorge Morgan cannot sit next to each other in court or hold joint conferences with their attorneys. The Morgans had also asked that they be together at the jail and when they are transported to and from the courthouse so that they could talk about the case.

But the judge would not overturn the decision by the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office.

"I don't see anything inappropriate" in that decision, Garber said. "I think security has to be paramount."

A jail lieutenant had testified that keeping the men separate was appropriate not only because of their relationship but also because of the violent nature of the crime of which they are accused and the attention it has received.

No one factor decides whether inmates should be kept separate, Lt. Kimberly Moule had said.

The Morgans are accused of robbing and stabbing to death 58-year-old Cynthia Ramos on Aug. 6 in her own home in Tracy.

Charles Slote, who represents Robert Morgan, told the judge Monday that the men wanted to be able to discuss the case. He said there were no signs that doing so would be a security problem.

Moule testified that a letter written from one of the men to the other - she did not know which of the Morgans wrote it - talked about "having to get out of this place and how much better things would be when they were on the streets."

"Unfortunately, we have had escapes out of our jail, so we do take these things seriously," Moule said.

While the Morgans cannot meet with each other, and must be kept physically apart, they can speak individually with their own attorneys.

"Obviously this was not central to the case itself," Slote said after the hearing. "It's a procedural kind of thing."

Deputy District Attorney Valli Israels said she was pleased the case could now move forward.

The Morgans are due back in court Friday to discuss the scheduling of their preliminary hearing.

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