

Moreno's Statements To Detectives And Doctors Discussed During Hearing; Murder Trial Set For Wednesday

By Shawn R. Beals

While police and fire crews frantically searched the Connecticut River for 7-month-old Aaden Moreno in 2015, the lead detective in the case rushed to Hartford Hospital to talk to the father about his son's location as hope of finding the child alive quickly faded.

Middletown Det. Dane Semper testified at Superior Court in Middletown Thursday that he interviewed Tony Moreno in the hospital's intensive care unit and asked him where Moreno might have thrown the boy into the river from the Arrigoni Bridge.

Semper said he used a basketball analogy for Moreno so Moreno could describe how he threw the baby off the bridge. Semper said he hoped that his description would help pinpoint where the baby entered the river and help guide authorities with their search.

"We were trying to find Aaden, that was the sole purpose,"

[Norm] Pattis ... tried to show that Moreno, because of his injuries after jumping off the bridge himself and being medicated in the hospital, was not capable of fully understanding his rights and that he was being questioned by police.



Tony Moreno, accused of throwing his 7-month-old son from the Arrigoni Bridge in 2015, appears in Middletown Superior Court on Wednesday morning for an administrative hearing ahead of a trial in his case. Jury selection is scheduled to begin next week. At right is Moreno's attorney Norm Pattis and at left is judicial marshal Sal Didato.

Semper told Judge Elpedio N. Vitale. “I also said we knew he had dropped Aaden off the bridge and I said I’d like to talk to him about that so he could assist us in finding Aaden. I stressed to him the importance of knowing what happened. I asked him straightforward, ‘Did you drop Aaden from the bridge.’ He nodded yes.”

Semper was one of several witnesses who testified in a hearing about whether Vitale should suppress statements Moreno made to police while he was at the hospital. Attorney Norman A. Pattis claims Moreno’s confession was coerced and that Moreno was not properly advised of his rights when police talked to him.

Vitale will decide whether the hospital statements should be part of the evidence a jury will hear when Moreno’s trial begins Wednesday. The hearing on the motion to suppress evidence is expected to conclude on Monday.

The hearing Thursday included two video clips taken by police of Semper talking with Moreno in the hospital room. The first video clip starts after Semper said he had read Moreno his Miranda rights, but the beginning of the interview is not shown because the other police officer in the room, Lee Buller, could not figure out how to use the camcorder for a few minutes, according to testimony.

Moreno, 23, seated at the defense table, did not watch the video while prosecutors played it in court Thursday morning. Instead, he stared straight ahead. The first video clip ends after Moreno asks Semper to turn off the camera. The video is clear and Semper’s questions can be easily heard.

After being asked to stop recording, Semper moved the camera to a table just outside the hospital room, but turned it back on and pointed it at Moreno’s bed from the hallway. In the second clip, very little is audible, but Semper and Moreno can be seen interacting in the video, Moreno responding to Semper’s questions and gestures with short replies, shrugs and nods.

In the video, Moreno is wearing a neck brace and has an oxygen tube under his nose. His eyes are swollen shut and he has IV tubes coming out of his arm.

Pattis, through questions to witnesses during the hearing, tried to show that Moreno, because of his injuries after jumping off the bridge himself and being medicated in the hospital, was not capable of fully understanding his rights and that he was being questioned by police.

Pattis’ motion, filed with the court Jan. 18, is critical of Middletown police. Pattis asked the police officers whether they had asked permission to be in

the hospital room when Moreno was not under arrest, and asked hospital employees called as witnesses whether any police officers had asked them for permission to stand by in the room.

The officers and the hospital staff said nobody had asked permission for the officers to be present in Moreno’s room.

Buller was assigned to monitor Moreno at the hospital and notify a supervisor when Moreno woke up. Buller testified that he was present in the room a while after Semper’s interview when Moreno was evaluated by a psychiatrist.

Buller said he asked Moreno twice if he should leave the room while the psychiatrist was there, and Moreno said he didn’t have to leave.

Buller recounted Moreno’s statements to the psychiatrist during testimony on Wednesday. He said during the evaluation that Moreno told the psychiatrist he had thought about killing himself before, but was worried that Aaden would not get to see the Moreno side of the family after his death.

“He didn’t want his son being raised by his girlfriend’s family so he knew what he needed to do, which was kill his son then kill himself,” Buller said. “[The psychiatrist] asked if he expected to die from jumping off the bridge, and his response was

“That was the plan.”

Semper and Buller, in his testimony Wednesday, said that Moreno was appropriately advised of his rights and appeared to fully understand what was happening at the hospital.

Moreno is charged with murder and risk of injury to a child. He faces up to 70 years in prison if convicted. ■