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Relatives of Victims Speak Out at Sentencing of Boston Marathon Bomber

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A pedestrian walks past death penalty protesters before the formal sentencing of convicted Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev at the federal courthouse in Boston, Massachusetts, June 24, 2015.

BOSTON — The mother of one of the three people killed in the Boston Marathon bombing, speaking at the Wednesday hearing where a U.S. judge will formally sentence Dzhokhar Tsarnaev to death, said the convicted bomber made "despicable" choices.

The same federal jury that earlier this year found Tsarnaev, 21, guilty of killing four people and injuring 264 in the bombing and its aftermath voted in May to sentence him to death by lethal injection. U.S. District Judge George O'Toole on Wednesday will order the punishment.

"You went down the wrong road," Patricia Campbell, whose 29-year-old daughter Krystle was one of three people killed by the twin pressure-cooker bombs, told Tsarnaev, who carried out one of the highest-profile attacks on U.S. soil since Sept. 11, 2001.

"I know life is hard, but the choices you made were despicable and what you did to my daughter was disgusting."

Campbell was the first of about two dozen survivors and relatives of the slain expected to make statements in federal court.

Tsarnaev appeared in court dressed in a dark sport jacket and open-collared shirt, still sporting the bushy hair and light beard he had worn during the trial. He looked down and showed no emotion during the early part of the hearing.

Tsarnaev's trial brought back some of Boston's darkest living memories. Jurors saw videos of the twin pressure-cooker bombs' blinding flashes and the chaotic aftermath on April 15, 2013 as emergency workers and spectators rushed to aid the wounded, many of whom lost legs.

In addition to Krystle Campbell, the bombing killed Martin Richard, 8, and Chinese exchange student Lingzi Lu, 26. Tsarnaev and his 26-year-old brother, Tamerlan, shot dead Massachusetts Institute of Technology police officer Sean Collier, 26, three days after the bombing.

Tamerlan Tsarnaev died following a gunfight with police after Collier's shooting.

During the trial, federal prosecutors described the ethnic Chechen brothers as adherents of al Qaeda's militant Islamist ideology who wanted to "punish America" with the attack on the world-renowned race.

Tsarnaev's lawyers admitted their client had played a role in the attack but tried to portray him as the junior partner in a scheme hatched and driven by his older brother. The Tsarnaev family came to the United States from Russia a decade before the attack.

"Could Have Changed His Mind"

The parents of Martin Richard, the youngest to die in the attack, directly addressed the defense's claim, saying the younger Tsarnaev could have prevented the attack.

"He could have stopped his brother," said William Richard, who testified during the trial about the agonizing decision he made to leave his son to die in his wife's arms so that he could save the life of his daughter, Jane, who lost a leg in the attack.

"He could have changed his mind the morning of April 15, 2013, walked away with a minimal sense of humanity and reported to authorities that his brother intended to hurt others," Richard said.

"He chose to do nothing, to prevent all of this from happening and he chose to accompany his brother and participate in this hate."

Tsarnaev, who did not testify in his own defense during the trial, will be able to speak but does not have to do so. He is expected to appeal.

Even after the sentencing, the legal wrangling over Tsarnaev's fate could play out over years,

if not decades. Just three of the 74 people sentenced to death in the United States for federal crimes since 1998 have been executed.

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