



Death threat in murder case

By Rich Riggs
STAFF WRITER

HAYWARD — Fears of potential courtroom violence prompted a judge to clear his court, close a hearing and have the relatives of a murder victim searched Wednesday.

Alameda County Superior Court Judge Ronald Sabraw took the unusual security steps after learning that death threats have been made against 16-year-old Freddie Elrod, who is accused of slaying his ex-girlfriend, Shannon McClure, 13.

The boy, a former Tennyson High School student, appeared before Sabraw Wednesday for what was to be the start of a hearing that will decide whether he is to be tried as an adult.

The hearing was postponed until April 17 after Elrod's lawyer, Kimberly Kupferer of the public defender's office, said she needs more time to investigate the case.

But before the proceedings began, Sabraw said he was taking the "unusual step" of closing the courtroom. He asked everyone but attorneys on the case to leave the courtroom but allowed a news reporter to stay.

When four of the murdered girl's relatives said they wanted to stay, a bailiff summoned them to a court conference room where they were searched for weapons.

Sabraw later explained his actions: "We have closed the courtroom because it was

brought to the court's attention at about 9 a.m. that there had been threats made against the minor (Elrod).

"On that basis, members of the victim's family could be excluded or submitted to a weapons search," he said.

Sabraw said he took that action in order to protect not only the boy, but others in the court.

The family members could not be contacted after the hearing, but Deputy District Attorney Dave Stein said they were not upset at being searched. "They understood the need for it. They had no problem with it," he said.

Kupferer would not explain the nature of

the threats, but said they were being taken seriously at Juvenile Hall. She said the threats are coming anonymously from outside of Juvenile Hall.

Elrod is accused of stabbing McClure, a King Intermediate School eighth-grade student, to death.

Her body was spotted by a train conductor at about 4 a.m. on Dec. 22 at a Southern Pacific Railroad tunnel south of Industrial Boulevard.

Hayward police reported that Elrod once dated the girl and had run away with her briefly. Elrod's relationship with her reportedly had ended shortly before the killing.

Police said the slaying occurred after Elrod argued with McClure at the tunnel.