

TEENS MAY WIN RELEASE

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Amy Beth Bennett, Sun Sentinel

Steven Shelton, 16, and Denver Jarvis, 15, two of the five suspects in the burning of Michael Brewer, 15, wait in a courtroom at the Broward County Courthouse on Monday. The Broward State Attorney's Office was granted a nine-day extension to file formal criminal charges.

Unless burn suspects are charged as adults, they must be freed until trial

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STAFF WRITERS

FORT LAUDERDALE » The teenagers accused of surrounding Michael Brewer and setting him on fire will have to be released from custody after Nov. 12 unless prosecutors charge them as adults, officials said.

Judges on Monday granted a nine-day extension for the Broward State Attorney's Office to file formal criminal charges against five of Brewer's schoolmates, who were arrested within a day of the attack at a Deerfield Beach apartment complex.

Prosecutors are still hoping for a firsthand account from the 15-year-old victim, who remains in critical condition in the Burn Center at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. Because of tubes, Brewer is unable to speak, doctors and family members said. Family members were relieved late last week when Brewer was able to open his eyes for the first time, but Sunday night was one of his more difficult since the Oct. 12 attack.

Dr. Nicholas Namias, medical director of the Burn Center, said he would be "pleasantly surprised," but it's unrealistic to expect Brewer's condition to improve.



Joe Cavaretta, Sun Sentinel

Jesus Mendez, 16, is accused of lighting the fire that critically injured Michael Brewer, of Deerfield Beach.

what's going on around him."

Brewer remains on a ventilator and is heavily sedated. "We're still in a place where terrible things can happen at any time," Namias said. On a more optimistic note, he said Brewer is responding well to his treatment. "Nothing right now is insurmountable."

The court's nine-day extension gives prosecutors until Nov. 12 to decide what charges each defendant will face, and whether they will stand trial as adults or juveniles.

If charged as juveniles, all five will be released in compliance with state law.

Closer look

For the latest on the burning of Michael Brewer and the ensuing legal proceedings, including video reports and photos, go to SunSentinel.com/setonfire

stand, not going to be charged with a capital crime. Jeremy Jarvis is 13, and the maximum charge he or any defendant would face is attempted murder.

That would change only if Brewer dies. "Jeremy will reside with family out of the area and will be home schooled for his safety," said his lawyer, Stephen Melnick. A guardian ad litem has been appointed for Jarvis, whose 15-year-old brother, Denver, is also accused in the attack. A court-appointed psychologist will perform a risk assessment to determine whether Jeremy Jarvis poses any danger to the community. Jarvis is due back in court Nov. 10, Melnick said.

Judge Robert H. Newman scheduled the next hearing at 8:30 a.m. Nov. 12 for Denver Jarvis, and co-defendants Matthew Bent, 15, and Steven Shelton, 16. Bent is accused of orchestrating the attack, and Jarvis is accused of pouring rubbing alcohol on Brewer.

Judge Merrilee Ehrlich scheduled the next hearing on the same date for Jesus Mendez, 16. Mendez is accused of lighting the fire. Both his parents showed up at Monday's hearing, and other relatives sat in the audience sobbing. The families of the other defendants similarly appeared in court, but declined to comment.