Matthew Farwell's jury is reporting a deadlock. Impasse is a familiar territory for Mass. jurors in high profile cases.

By Laura Crimaldi and Sean Cotter Globe Staff, Updated November 10, 2026, 12:20 p.m.



Matthew Farwell is being tried in the John Joseph Moakley United States Courthouse in Boston. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

The note came with a hush of silence on late Monday afternoon: The jury deciding the fate of former Stoughton police detective Matthew Farwell reported they were deadlocked.

It's become a familiar, and dreaded, term in recent high-profile criminal trials in Massachusetts.

Just two months ago, Lindsay Clancy's trial in the killing of her three children ended without a verdict after jurors split 11 to 1.

And Karen Read's first trial in the death of her boyfriend, Boston police officer John O'Keefe, also ended in a mistrial because of a divided jury.

Similar circumstances forced a second trial in the case of Emanuel A. Lopes, who was eventually convicted of killing Weymouth police Sergeant Michael Chesna and a 77-year-old woman.

The jury system is a pillar of the American criminal justice system. But recent hung juries in a series of high-profile murder cases here serve as reminders that a unanimous verdict rests on reconciling varying perspectives from 12 people from varying backgrounds.

“The higher profile the case, the more likely it is to involve these visceral emotions,” said longtime defense attorney Martin G. Weinberg. “And it’s hard to get 12 people who are all going to feel the same emotions the same way.”

Juries can have a hard time getting on the same page for the same reasons the case caught the public’s interest in the first place, he said: The cases raise big, often complex questions that stir controversy.



Sandra Birchmore. (Family photo) FAMILY PHOTO

Weinberg, who handled appeals for both Read and Clancy, said the recent high-profile trials have presented juries with dueling narratives, leaving juries to decide which version is true. A more typical criminal case often only requires the juries to decide whether the prosecution's case leaves room for reasonable doubt. When juries must decide between two plausible scenarios, a mistrial is often an outcome.

The panel of eight men and four women in Farwell's case disclosed the impasse in one of two notes read in court Monday afternoon. In the first note, the jurors asked for scheduling guidance. They immediately followed up with a second note reporting a deadlock.

Chief US District Court Judge Denise Casper dismissed the jury for the evening and jurors reconvened to continue deliberations Tuesday morning.



Former Stoughton police detective Matthew Farwell UNCREDITED/STOUGHTON POLICE DEPARTMENT VIA

Casper told the jurors it's not unusual for juries in criminal cases to return "day-to-day" to deliberate and noted the trial produced hours of testimony and many exhibits.

"I instruct that you take the time that you need," Casper told them. Shortly after 9 a.m., she told them to resume their deliberations. Previous trials with jurors at an impasse ended with different outcomes.

Norfolk County prosecutors retried Read, but her second trial ended in her acquittal on all charges connected to O'Keefe's death. But the same DA's office prevailed in the second trial of Lopes, securing murder convictions, though that jury too reported it was deadlocked at one point, before apparently breaking the impasse after continued deliberations.

Plymouth County prosecutors are weighing whether to retry Clancy, and, if so, on what charges.

Alan Tuerkheimer, a jury consultant in Chicago, said the public attention in high-profile trials can pressurize deliberations. Jurors see courtroom galleries filled with spectators and journalists, he said.

“It does up the ante a little bit,” Tuerkheimer said. “The stakes are a little higher…I do think that jurors understand that their verdict will be scrutinized.”

He pointed to the outcry directed at the Clancy jury, after questions were raised about the background of the lone holdout juror.

“I don’t think what happened with Lindsay Clancy is doing anybody any favors in terms of jurors feeling comfortable that their verdict is going to be accepted and protected,” Tuerkheimer said.

In Farwell’s case, the jury of eight men and four women must decide whether he strangled Sandra Birchmore, as the prosecution alleged, or whether she killed herself.

The jury has been stoic, even in the face of graphic evidence. At one point, they leaned in to better see pictures of Birchmore’s body where it was found hanging. One man slowly put his hand to his mouth as he considered a photo of her corpse. At other times, they scribbled in notebooks, or seemingly attentively looked on as a prosecutor and FBI agent read aloud sexually explicit texts between Farwell and Birchmore as the pair reminisced

about a sexual encounter in April 2013, when she was 15, and would have been under the age of consent.

Scott Horwitz, national managing director of consulting, graphics, and tech at Magna Legal Services, said Farwell's jury is considering a massive trove of evidence, including the 40,000 messages found on Birchmore's cellphones and laptop. Many of those communications were with Farwell.

So many messages, some with conflicting information and offered in different contexts by the prosecution and the defense, may complicate the deliberations, he said.

"When I hear that they're deadlocked, especially in a case with all the evidence that we have in this case, I think to me it means that they're trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together, and there's some pieces that they're missing," said Horwitz, a former prosecutor in Chicago.

Juries who report impasses are usually sorting through circumstantial evidence from prosecutors that has been challenged by the defense, he said.

"You have to put the pieces of the puzzle together in a way that makes sure the jury understands your story clearly and cleanly," Horwitz said.

Farwell's jury must reach unanimous verdicts on two indictments against him. He has pleaded not guilty.

The first count is killing a witness or victim. Prosecutors allege Farwell, 41, killed Birchmore, 23, on Feb. 1, 2021 to prevent information she possessed about his alleged federal crimes from reaching US law enforcement officials.

If convicted, Farwell faces an automatic sentence of life in prison.

The second count is called "protection of unborn children." When Birchmore died, she was pregnant and due to give birth to a baby boy in September 2021.

Farwell is accused of causing the death of Birchmore's fetus.

Farwell avoided prosecution for years even as evidence emerged that he had agreed to try to impregnate Birchmore in exchange for her promise not to reveal the alleged criminal origin of their sexual relationship.

Birchmore's friends and family insisted she did not kill herself and urged detectives to scrutinize Farwell.

More than two-and-a-half years after Birchmore died, the FBI launched an investigation and pursued evidence that prosecutors said had been overlooked or discounted during Morrissey's initial probe. FBI agents consulted a medical expert who concluded Birchmore didn't kill herself as the state medical examiner ruled, but had been strangled.

Trial testimony began Oct. 13 and the jury has been deliberating since Friday.

Laura Crimaldi can be reached at laura.crimaldi@globe.com. Follow her @lauracrimaldi. Sean Cotter can be reached at sean.cotter@globe.com. Follow him @cotterreporter.

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