

# Waffle House shooting suspect Travis Reinking to get mental health evaluation

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Travis Reinking, the suspect in the April 22 shooting that killed four people at an Antioch Waffle House, will get a mental health evaluation before his case moves forward.

General Sessions Judge Michael Mondelli approved public defender Jon Wing's request for an outpatient "forensic" examination Monday during the first major court date in the case.

Police released the 911 call that led to Travis Reinking's arrest 34 hours after authorities say he killed four people in a shooting at an Antioch Waffle House.

Mondelli's order specifies that the evaluation will address two distinct issues: his "competency to stand trial," or his present state of mind, and his "mental condition at the time of the crime." The description of the latter referenced the possibility of an "insanity defense."

"The staff shall assess whether the defendant at the time of criminal conduct, as a result of severe mental disease or defect was unable to appreciate the wrongfulness of his/her conduct," Mondelli's order states.

Psychiatrists at Vanderbilt University Medical Center will administer the evaluation.

Top prosecutors from the district attorney's office were on hand for the court date, including Roger Moore and Jan Norman. Norman did not object to Wing's request for an assessment.

Both sides will meet again in June to discuss next steps.

Reinking, 29, did not appear in court Monday. But a woman and a young boy who were family members of a Waffle House shooting victim sat in the front row. The woman dabbed tears from her eyes while the boy wrapped his arms around her.

Prosecutors greeted the woman before the court appearance and walked out with her and the boy afterward.

## Evaluation the first step toward establishing an insanity defense

Nashville defense attorney David Raybin said Reinking's personal history — which includes multiple interactions with police who described him as a "paranoid" and "delusional," noting his "mental issues" — suggests an insanity defense is likely.

"I suggest that he will most definitely have an insanity defense presented," Raybin said.

Before that conclusion can be reached, Raybin said, the prosecution and defense can order added rounds of evaluations that could take months to complete.

If he is judged to be incompetent to stand trial, doctors might look for medicine to restore his competency. The insanity defense would focus on Reinking's state of mind during the shooting.

Raybin said a preliminary hearing, during which witnesses would be called to describe the shooting under oath, is still on the table, although it is unclear when that might take place.

If the defense attorneys pursue an insanity defense for Reinking, the odds could be stacked against them.

Christopher Slobogin, director of the Criminal Justice Program at Vanderbilt University Law School, said it is "very rare" for an insanity defense to win in a case of this magnitude.

Slobogin cited the example of the 2012 mass shooting in an Aurora, Colorado movie theater that killed 12 people. The jury in that case rejected the defense's argument that shooter James Holmes was not guilty by reason of insanity.

"Jurors have a hard time affixing the label not guilty to that kind of defendant," Slobogin said.

"It's true across the country, but Tennessee juries are noteworthy for being hostile to insanity pleas in homicide cases," he added.

Reinking left trail of bizarre behavior in the years before the shooting  
Raybin and Slobogin said Reinking's history could be a key part of establishing an insanity defense. Records show Reinking had a series of bizarre interactions with police in the years before the Waffle House shooting.

His parents once told officers he had been having delusions since 2014.

Illinois police took Reinking into protective custody in 2016 after he was found "delusional" in a CVS parking lot, according to a police report. Reinking believed that Taylor Swift, his family and police were involved in hacking into his phone and stalking him.

He was taken to a local hospital for a mental health evaluation. It's unknown what the evaluation found.

His coworkers at a crane company in Colorado said he exhibited bizarre behaviors while he lived there in 2016 and 2017. According to police interviews with the coworkers, Reinking had an "obsession" with Taylor Swift, who he believed was stalking and harassing him, and hacking his bank accounts.

In June 2017, Reinking had threatened an employee of his father's crane company in Illinois while holding an AR-15 rifle and wearing a pink dress, according to police. Later the same day, police said, he drove to a public pool, took off the pink dress and jumped in, exposing himself and yelling.

In a report about that incident, police said "Travis has some mental problems."

Reinking was arrested in July when the U.S. Secret Service said he was in a "restricted area" near the White House. Soon after, his Illinois firearms authorization was revoked. Illinois authorities gave four of Reinking's weapons, including the AR-15 police said he used during the Waffle House shooting, to his father.

Reinking's father later admitted to giving the guns back to his son, according to Nashville police.

Reinking is charged with using the AR-15 to kill Taurean C. Sanderlin, 29; Joe R. Perez, 20; DeEbony Groves, 21; and Akilah Dasilva, 23. He also faces four counts of attempted homicide and one count of using a firearm while committing a dangerous felony.

Police said Reinking fired 30 rounds at the Waffle House on Murfreesboro Pike before customer James Shaw Jr. intervened and wrested the gun away from him.

Reinking was the subject of a 34-hour manhunt before police arrested him in a wooded area near the Waffle House.