

Biased enced death

agic words and having them things that look good in the d.”

came to the point where it 't a matter of rehabilitation ors, but clarification of what I said — what was really in heart and mind,” he said.

rrrett also argued that the was limited in the sentencing e to considering only her Heidler was insane. rts testified that Heidler was ally ill, but not insane.

written legal briefs, Hei- s lawyers outlined other nds for dismissing his ction.

ey say intense media cover- of the slayings prejudiced s against Heidler and that an t called to testify on Hei- s mental state should not been allowed to testify he itted to the killings.

e murders two weeks before tmas in 1997 stunned the residents of Santa Claus, e 70 miles west of Savannah e many Georgians stop dur- the holidays to get their tmas cards postmarked.

idler, who was 20 at the of the slayings, apparently been banned from the



TAJMY ALVAREZ / Staff

Trial errors alleged: A lawyer for convicted murderer Jerry Scott Heidler, shown in 1997, told the Georgia Supreme Court Monday that the trial judge made several errors.

Daniels' home two years earlier when he took a romantic interest in their teenage daughter.

Prosecutors said he kidnapped three of the couple's girls — ages 8, 9 and 10 — after the shootings, sexually assaulting one of them at the Altamaha River. Two younger children were left behind with the four bodies.

Because of pretrial publicity, Heidler's trial was moved 130 miles north to Walton County.

Jurors deliberated just over an hour before recommending the death penalty.

Law tells immigrants guilty plea can mean deportation

By Mark Bixler
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The choice seems deceptively simple to legal immigrants charged with minor crimes: plead guilty, spend a year on probation and get on with their lives.

Then the federal government kicks them out of the country. “They're just blown away. They have no idea,” said Socheat Chea, an Atlanta immigration attorney.

A state law effective July 1 will require Georgia judges to tell immigrants that guilty pleas can affect immigration status. Along with a letter from Georgia's parole and pardons board, the law adds the voice of state legislators and officials to a growing chorus of criticism of a 1996 federal immigration law. The goal in 1996 was to get rid of drug dealers and violent criminals, but hundreds of legal immigrants have been deported for crimes as minor as shoplifting.

While three bills to change the law are pending in Congress and even the INS says legislators should revise it, state and local officials aren't waiting to do something about it.

Georgia will join the District of Columbia and at least 14 states that ask immigrants if they understand the ripple effects of a guilty plea. Many of the states, including California and Texas, have high immigrant populations.

Legislators in New York are to vote soon on requiring judges to quiz misdemeanor defendants — they already ask in felony cases. In Florida last month, the state Supreme Court ruled that non-U.S. citizens who plead guilty without being told about possible deportation can ask for a new trial.

The author of Georgia's law, Rep. Barbara Mobley (D-Decatur), is an immigration lawyer. She said she introduced the bill after consulting with other immigration lawyers and Judge William A. Cassidy of the Federal Immigration Court in Atlanta.

Bonnie Youn, former president of the Georgia Asian Pacific American Bar Association, said many immigrants feel “an extreme amount of pressure to plead guilty” because it seems the best way to move on. She hailed the new law.

Immigration attorneys say several dozen immigrants in metro Atlanta have been deported after committing relatively minor crimes, but more specific numbers are hard to come by.

A few judges in Georgia have begun putting people on probation for 11 months and 29 days because the standard 12 months given for probation would trigger deportation, said Youn and Judge Jim Watkins of Doraville Municipal Court. Watkins and Judge Jack M. McLaughlin of DeKalb

State Court already ask immigrants if they realize a guilty plea could change their status. Mobley said she did not know if any other judges do that.

And more immigrants are asking for a pardon to avoid deportation. Last year, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole gave one pardon to prevent an immigrant's deportation. This year, the board has granted 10 such pardons and 14 more are pending, said Kathy Browning, board spokeswoman.

Board members have grown so concerned about the effects of the immigration law on people convicted of misdemeanors that they wrote Sen. Max Cleland to urge “some measure of justice.” They said in a March 3 letter that they have seen cases of immigrants who lived here 30 years and face deportation for a misdemeanor they committed years ago.

“These applicants include respected businessmen who have small children and no family residing in the country or origin,” the letter says.

Matt Tallman, spokesman for the American Immigration Lawyers Association in Washington, said few immigrants know what can happen when they plead guilty to misdemeanors. “They just don't understand that if you're an immigrant and you plead guilty to a DUI ... you could be deported for that,” he said.