

# PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

## CRIMINAL DIVISION

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Chief Assistant Prosecutor

Twenty-year-old Payton Mellema pled guilty today, as charged, to Arson 3rd Degree and Animal Cruelty for a fire he started at a Lowell barn that caused the death of 13 horses, as well as significant property damage.

Mellema was a neighbor at the time who previously had volunteered at the Center for Equine Learning, operated out of the barn. Mellema has a long history of mental health and behavioral issues. He is presently incarcerated at the Kent County Correctional Facility.

After months of investigation by the Kent County Sheriff's Department, in cooperation with the Kent County Prosecutor's Office, Mellema admitted his involvement in a statement to investigators during the course of plea negotiations. The parties entered into a plea agreement, designed to protect the community while still addressing the Defendant's circumstances, the main points of the agreement are:

1. He will serve a 5-year term of probation, with no early release or attempts to seek early release and/or termination of that probationary period;
2. He will be continuously housed and treated for the first 3 years of probation at a residential facility approved by the parties, which may include electronic monitoring;
3. Mr. Mellema will have no contact with the victims or property located at Timpson Ave. SE, Lowell, Michigan 49331, for the full term of probation and not reside or have any contact with his past address located on Timpson Ave. SE, Lowell, Michigan 49331;

This agreement ensures that the Defendant will be housed in a secured facility for at least three years. He will receive the treatment he needs in order to attempt to prevent any further similar activity. Arsons are difficult cases to prosecute, the evidence available in this case was only circumstantial. Without the Defendant's cooperation, we may not have been able to get a conviction and he would have been a continued threat to the community.

This plea agreement was entered into after consulting with the victims in the case and it has their full approval. Sentencing date has been set for October 31st at 2PM in front of Judge Johnston.

Christopher Becker  
Prosecuting Attorney