

MURDER IN THE FIRST DEGREE
(Intentional Murder of Witness
To Prevent Witness's Testimony)
Penal Law § 125.27(1)(a)(v)
(Committed on or after Sept. 1, 1995)
(Revised¹)

The (*specify*) count is Murder in the First Degree.

Under our law, a defendant is guilty of Murder in the First Degree when, with intent to cause the death of another person, the defendant causes the death of such person [*or* of a third person]², and the intended victim was a witness to a crime committed on a prior occasion and the death was caused for the purpose of preventing the intended victim's testimony in any criminal action or proceeding, and the defendant was more than eighteen (18) years old at the time of the commission of the crime.

The definition of the crime requires that the defendant cause the death for the purpose of preventing the intended victim's testimony in a criminal action or proceeding. It is not required that the death be caused only for that purpose. What is required is that the motivation to eliminate the intended victim as a witness was a substantial reason for the murder.³

The following terms used in that definition have a special meaning:

¹ This charge was revised twice. The last revision was effective May 20, 2004. That revision added the third paragraph to incorporate the law set down by *People v. Cahill*, 2 N.Y.3d 14 (2003). The previous revision had taken effect on October 25, 2001.

² If transferred intent applies and is in issue, see the definition of transferred intent in the Additional Charges at the end of this article.

³ *People v. Cahill*, 2 N.Y.2d 14 (2003).

INTENT means conscious objective or purpose. Thus, a person acts with intent to cause the death of another person when his or her conscious objective or purpose is to cause the death of that person.⁴

A CRIMINAL ACTION OR PROCEEDING is any proceeding which involves a criminal investigation, or which constitutes part of a criminal prosecution, or which occurs in a criminal court and is related to any prospective, pending, or completed criminal prosecution.⁵ It encompasses criminal actions and proceedings whether or not they have been commenced.⁶

In order for you to find the defendant guilty of this crime, the People are required to prove, from all the evidence in the case, beyond a reasonable doubt, each of the following five elements:

1. That on or about (date), in the county of (county), the defendant, (defendant's name), caused the death of (specify);
2. That the defendant did so with the intent to cause the death of (specify);
3. That (specify) was a witness to a crime committed on a prior occasion;
4. That the death was caused for the purpose of preventing (specify)'s testimony in a criminal action or

⁴See Penal Law § 15.05(1). For an expanded charge on intent, see General Charges, Culpable Mental States, Intent.

⁵This charge integrates CPL § 1.20(16) & (18). See CPL § 1.20(16) for the definition of "criminal action" and CPL § 1.20(18) for the definition of "criminal proceeding."

⁶See Penal Law § 125.27(1)(a)(v).

proceeding; and

5. That the defendant was more than eighteen (18) years old at the time of the commission of the crime.

If you find the People have proven beyond a reasonable doubt each of those elements, you must find the defendant guilty of this crime.

If you find the People have not proven beyond a reasonable doubt any one or more of those elements, you must find the defendant not guilty of this crime.

[NOTE: If either of the affirmative defenses -- Extreme Emotional Disturbance (§ 125.27(2)(a)) or Aiding a Suicide (§ 125.27(2)(b)) -- applies, omit the final two paragraphs of the above charge, and substitute one of the charges at the end of this article.]