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Kohberger Faces Final Chance to Speak Before Sentencing in Idaho Student Killings

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Bryan Kohberger is scheduled to appear in court Wednesday for his last opportunity to address the families of four University of Idaho students he admitted to murdering in November 2022. While he can speak during the sentencing hearing, legal experts believe Kohberger is unlikely to reveal why he committed the killings.

Kohberger pleaded guilty earlier this month to burglary and first-degree murder, avoiding the death penalty and a lengthy trial. Prosecutors described how Kohberger broke into a home in Moscow, Idaho, and stabbed Ethan Chapin, Xana Kernodle, Kaylee Goncalves, and

Madison Mogen to death. Two other roommates in the home were spared. However, the motive behind targeting these students remains unclear.

At the sentencing, Kohberger will be given the right of allocution. This legal right allows defendants to speak directly to the court before the judge issues a sentence. It is typically used to express remorse, apologize, or provide an explanation that might affect sentencing. The American Bar Association explains that allocution allows the defendant to humanise themselves. But many expect Kohberger to remain silent.

Legal analyst Mercedes Colwin told *CNN*, “What we can expect in sentencing would first be the victim impact statements by the families. We already know that there are several who are going to speak, which should be horrendous. I’m sure it’s going to be gut-wrenching, and then he will be given the opportunity to address the court before the judge sentences him. That’s where he can say, ‘I’m sorry for what I’ve done,’ which I don’t expect any of that to take place.”

Throughout his court appearances, Kohberger has been expressionless and silent as prosecutors described the gruesome details. His recent change-of-plea hearing revealed his guilt but did not explain his motive. Judge Steven Hippler asked only basic questions to ensure Kohberger understood the charges and consequences, but did not seek further details.

Final Opportunity

The plea deal does not require Kohberger to explain why he committed the crimes or why he targeted the students specifically. This leaves many unanswered questions, much to the frustration of the victims’ families. Xana Kernodle’s father said, “I had hoped the agreement would include conditions that required the defendant to explain his actions and provide answers to the many questions that still remain, especially where evidence is missing or unclear.”

Allocution rights go back centuries and have been used by notable figures, including convicted murderers such as Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy. In Idaho, defendants have the right to allocution but are not forced to speak. Statements are not made under oath and cannot be cross-examined.

If Kohberger chooses not to speak at sentencing, there is still the possibility he could talk to the media later, as his plea agreement does not prevent interviews or writing. Many court documents remain sealed and may only be opened after sentencing, which could provide further insight.

Families of the victims have mixed reactions. Some, like the Goncalves family, criticised prosecutors for not consulting with them on the plea deal. Steve Goncalves said, “We’ll never see this as justice.” Others, like Madison Mogen’s family, support the deal as a way to avoid a painful trial. Mogen’s father said, “We support the plea agreement 100%. While we know there are some who do not support it, we ask that they respect our belief that this is the best outcome possible for victims, their families, and the state of Idaho.”

Kohberger will be sentenced to life in prison without parole and will lose his right to appeal. For future hearings, he will wear prison clothing instead of civilian attire.

Colwin concluded, “To the families of Kaylee, Madison, Xana, and Ethan, we will never forget the beautiful light your precious children shone brightly in the world. No evil will ever take that away.”