

Judge orders baby to be given blood transfusion

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A TWO-WEEK-OLD baby was given the chance to live when a High Court judge ruled in favour of a blood transfusion which was against his Jehovah's Witness parents' religious beliefs.

After being approached by an unidentified doctor, legal aid attorneys worked around the clock last Friday arranging a late-night court sitting in the hope that a ruling by the Port Elizabeth High Court would save the boy's life.

Port Elizabeth Legal Aid Board advocate Lilla Crouse said the order for the transfusion was given at about 7pm on Friday. "I arranged for the judge, the stenographer and registrar to be at court at six."

The court heard that the baby boy was born 10 weeks prematurely on June 23 by means of an emergency caesarean section.

"The parents' religious beliefs do not allow blood or blood products to be administered to them or their children," Crouse said.

"They knew that their refusal meant signing the death warrant for the child."

She said it was fortunate that the Constitution protected human life as this was what saved the boy.

"What a difficult decision to make and what grace that our Con-



RONNIE PILLAY

stitution protects life."

The doctor testified that the baby's condition had been deteriorating since last Monday and that there was a probability the baby would die that (Friday) evening.

Judge Ronnie Pillay explained his decision on the go-ahead of the transfusion to the parents.

Pillay asked the doctor testifying if he could help by making a High Court order that would speed up the blood type matching in a race against time.

Shortly after the judgment was handed down by Pillay, the child was admitted to Greenacres Hospital for the transfusion.

Doctors said the boy had shown a vast improvement when Crouse called the hospital to find out how the operation went.

According to South African law only medical superintendents can grant approval on behalf of parents. Private hospitals, however, don't have superintendents which was when Crouse got involved.

"At wits' end, the doctor phoned the family advocate's office who referred them to me," said Crouse. "They called fairly late on Friday afternoon and I literally stopped our Legal Aid Board attorney, Ronel Herman, as she was leaving the office on the way to take her own child to the doctor."