

News Release

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Joseph Umphlett sentenced to life in prison for Trafficking Methamphetamine

Moncks Corner, S.C. – Solicitor Scarlet A. Wilson announces that on Thursday, October 1, 2015, a Berkeley County jury convicted defendant Joseph Umphlett of Trafficking Methamphetamine, Possession of a Weapon During a Violent Crime, and Possession of a Weapon by a Person Convicted of a Violent Felony. The charges were predicated in part upon his 2006 conviction for Trafficking Cocaine, which is considered a violent crime under South Carolina law. On May 11, 2014, officers with the Summerville Police Department detained the Defendant after responding to a call for a child welfare check at the Economy Inn and observing evidence of other illegal activity. As a result of their observations, Summerville Police Officers contacted the Summerville/Dorchester Metro Narcotics Unit. Detectives with Metro Narcotics arrested Umphlett after executing a search warrant and retrieved, among other things, three loaded guns, approximately 197 grams of methamphetamine, and other drug paraphernalia. Umphlett's record, which included three serious crimes, made him eligible for a sentence of life without parole. Following the announcement of the guilty verdict, presiding Circuit Court Judge Kristi Lea Harrington sentenced Umphlett to Life Without Parole on the Trafficking Methamphetamine charge and five years on each weapons charge.

During the investigation, on May 11, 2014, the Defendant admitted that he was purchasing methamphetamine in Georgia and bringing it to South Carolina for sale. Experts from the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) informed the Solicitor's Office that the methamphetamine involved in Umphlett's case was of a quality that indicated it was produced by sophisticated drug manufacturers.

During the four-day trial, Assistant Solicitors Jessica Godwin Nickles and Wilton McNeely presented witnesses from both law enforcement agencies involved in the case as well as an expert forensic chemical analyst from SLED. The jury heard testimony regarding the search of the Defendant's hotel room and reviewed over 100 pieces of physical evidence, including the weapons and drugs retrieved by law enforcement. It took the jury only thirty minutes to convict Umphlett.

Assistant Solicitor Jessica Godwin Nickles said she was grateful for the efforts of law enforcement in collecting the evidence and statements needed to bring Mr. Umphlett to justice.