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SCARLETT A. WILSON

Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

LIFE SENTENCE FOR THE MURDER OF MEMBER OF CHARLESTON'S TIGHT-KNIT FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

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Charleston, S.C.— Solicitor Scarlett A. Wilson announced that a Charleston County jury convicted Defendant Tyler Deshayne Heyward of the November 2023 murder of Wesley Francis. Francis was a server at The Tempest restaurant in the Market area. Before his death, he also had begun a “pop up” restaurant with a friend. Upon the conviction, the Honorable Jennifer McCoy sentenced Heyward to life in prison. Solicitor Wilson stated, “Judge McCoy recognized the urgency in keeping Heyward off the streets forever. Wes’ family has been unbelievably patient and supportive of our prosecution. Despite this heinous and random act of violence, they remain incredible ambassadors for this great city.” Solicitor Scarlett Wilson and Assistant Solicitor Daniel Cooper prosecuted the case.

Court ordered mental evaluations revealed that Heyward had a history of mental illness, including several hospitalizations. Self-medicating with marijuana seemed to exacerbate his symptoms. “There’s a dangerous idea out there that ‘today’s’ marijuana is harmless. Young people are especially at risk of developing schizophrenia when they chronically use marijuana. We will never know for sure what caused Heyward’s mental illness and while this is a sad fact, it does not excuse his behavior or minimize the danger he poses to our community.” Wilson said.

The Charleston Police Department’s thorough investigation ensured that the facts of this case were straightforward. Testimony and video evidence showed that Wesley was gunned down at the Circle K gas station at the corner of Meeting and Calhoun Streets shortly after 5am on November 10, 2023. There was no argument, no fight between him and Heyward. Heyward simply exited the driver’s side of a Nissan Altima, approached Wesley and opened fire with 18 shots, 16 of which struck Wesley. Wesley did not stand a chance.

Grainy video from a nearby Tesla and the Circle K captured the murder. Heyward was identified because the Nissan Altima he was driving belonged to his girlfriend’s mother. License tag readers and street cameras tracked the car to and from the area of the Circle K and Heyward’s girlfriend’s home in Hollywood. There, CPD officers located the murder weapon in Heyward’s bag. Heyward’s DNA was on the gun. Gunshot residue was found on the steering wheel and gearshift of the Altima. While the video of the shooting is somewhat pixelated, Heyward fit the description of the shooter, and he is captured in identical clothing on surveillance video from other cameras within hours of the shooting.

Assistant Solicitor Daniel Cooper noted the painstaking work of CPD. “Detective Michael Galka led the team of investigators pouring over surveillance video from across the city. They dotted all the i’s and crossed the t’s with gunshot residue and DNA to make sure we had what we needed to convict Heyward,” said Cooper.

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