

# For Immediate Release

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## Summerville Woman Sentenced

October 25, 2022 – Summerville, GA – A Summerville woman was convicted for two felony counts of Making a False Statement following a jury trial that took nearly one month to complete. On Thursday, September 29, 2022, Judge Don Thompson sentenced Susan Renee Lanham, 56, to serve a total of ten years in prison. After deliberating for four days, the jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict on murder, aggravated assault, conspiracy to commit murder, and criminal solicitation charges, and a mistrial was declared as to those counts. Prosecutors negotiated a resolution of the case which included imposition of the maximum sentence allowed by law on two False Statement counts in exchange for dismissal of the remaining counts. The Defendant waived any right to appeal her sentence.

On September 18, 2017, Edward Earl Lanham, 75, was found shot to death in his bedroom. Evidence presented at trial showed that the crime scene gave the appearance that the home had been burglarized, but investigators with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Chattooga County Sheriff's Office quickly determined the scene had been staged. Items from the alleged burglary were found discarded on the side of Halls Valley Road several weeks after the murder. Susan Renee Lanham, the victim's wife, contacted 911 to report the murder late that evening, but gave numerous conflicting stories regarding her whereabouts that day and made multiple false statements to law enforcement. Investigators found suspicious communications on the Defendant's cell phone with Zachary Hughes, the Defendant's nephew who lived in Albany. When interviewed, Hughes indicated the Defendant asked him to kill her husband because she was \$100,000 in debt, had no way to pay the money back, and that she was afraid that her husband would find out. Hughes did not carry out the murder, and indicated his intent in communicating with the Defendant was simply to obtain money from her.

Due to the complex nature of the investigation and the COVID pandemic, the trial was delayed for several years, during which two key witnesses passed away. Eddie Stroup, the lead investigator for the Chattooga County Sheriff's Office, passed away in October 2020 while Jimmy Lanham, the victim's brother, passed away in January 2022. After the trial began on August 22, two separate week long delays disrupted the case due to a party contracting COVID and unprecedented flooding in Chattooga County.

In reaching an agreed resolution, prosecutors cited the difficulty of moving forward with a retrial due to the circumstantial nature of the case, the lack of physical evidence, and the improbability that a future jury would be able to reach a unanimous verdict. District Attorney Chris A. Arnt stated "While this is not the result we wanted the Defendant will be serving a decade in prison, and has given up any right to appeal this sentence. A retrial of this case would have been extremely difficult given the overall nature

of the evidence, and the death of critical witnesses. Given the hurdles to a potential retrial we had to make the difficult decision to accept this resolution to at least impose a substantial prison term in this case.”

The case was investigated by Steve Rogers with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Eddie Stroup with the Chattooga County Sheriff’s Office. The case was prosecuted by Chief Assistant District Attorney Kevin Baugh and Assistant District Attorney Winston Franklin.

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