

# For Immediate Release

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Jury quickly convicts Catoosa County man of rape

March 25, 2022 – Ringgold, Georgia — A Catoosa County man was convicted of rape by a Catoosa County jury following a three-day trial before Judge Ralph Van Pelt ending on March 23, 2022. Lon Taylor Willbanks, 28, was convicted on 1 count of rape in less than one hour of deliberation by the jury.

On the night of November 6, 2016, Willbanks was in the home of his former girlfriend. Over the course of several hours, Willbanks verbally, psychologically, and physically abused his former girlfriend. Willbanks then entered the victim's bedroom and raped her. All of these acts took place with the former girlfriend's two children in the home. One of the children made an audio recording of the physical abuse using a tablet from inside her bedroom.

The victim made two 911 calls to law enforcement the morning of the rape. After the second call, Willbanks fled the residence upon learning that the victim contacted police.

At trial, the victim took the stand and testified to the hours of abuse she suffered in her own home and testified to the rape. A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner testified to numerous injuries that the victim suffered to her body. This included numerous bruises, abrasions, swelling, and tears to parts of her body. A DNA expert testified that Mr. Willbanks's DNA was present as a result of the rape. A former wife to the Defendant testified that she had also been raped several times by the Defendant. The victim and former wife testified to extremely similar facts to one another in each instance of rape—although they did not know each other.

Willbanks took the stand and during the course of his cross-examination he was shown to be lying about previous details he had given about the rape. Willbanks was also cross-examined on the fact that he brought the book *A Girl With a Dragon Tattoo* to prior hearings of this rape case, a book which centers on a female character avenging her rape. Willbanks was read portions of the book which depicted the graphic rape of the female character. He then refused to answer several questions on cross-examination when asked by the State.

The case was presented by Assistant District Attorney Clay Fuller. During closing arguments, Fuller argued that the eerily similar accounts of the former wife and the victim could not be explained by mere coincidence, but rather that the Defendant was guilty of rape. The case was expertly investigated by Detective Daniel Thacker of the Catoosa County Sheriff's Office. Victim Advocate Ashley Nicholson worked for years with the victim in the case and in the preparation of the case for trial.

The victim in the case stated "After 6 long years, the nightmare is finally over. Justice has been served and I could not be more grateful. I would like to thank Assistant District Attorney Clay Fuller,

Detective Daniel Thacker, Victim Advocate Ashley Nicholson and all the employees at the Sexual Assault Center for their support through this nightmare. I am a survivor.”

District Attorney Chris Arnt praised ADA Fuller and Mrs. Nicholson for their work on the case. “My office will zealously and relentlessly prosecute sexual predators in our community. Their work on this case was nothing short of remarkable, and seeing the tears of joy from the victim after the verdict was a moment me and my team will never forget.” Arnt also praised the Catoosa County Sheriff’s Office and the Sexual Assault Center for their work on the case. “Without this team effort, a conviction would not have been possible. These incredible professionals put their heart and soul into the case—and together we took a sex offender off the street.”

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