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Wayne County Prosecutor's Office CIU Dismisses Charges Against Dennis Atkins

Summary of the Facts

On June 4, 2005, at approximately 4:00 a.m., Billie Rutledge was fatally shot in a vacant lot on Omira Street in Detroit. Mr. Rutledge was shot once, witnesses called 911 and EMS responded, placing Rutledge (still alive) on the stretcher. The shooter returned, yelled to EMS to back up, and shot Mr. Rutledge twice more, killing him as he lay on the stretcher. No witnesses identified the shooter. On January 25, 2006, Dennis Atkins was sentenced to one count of First-Degree Premeditated Murder, two counts of Assault with Intent to Murder, and one count of Felony Firearm.

His convictions were based upon the testimony of his ex-girlfriend, her brother, and her brother's girlfriend. They said that several days after the homicide, an inebriated Atkins bragged about killing Rutledge when he was on the stretcher. After Mr. Atkins made the admission, the witnesses gave statements to the police about the Rutledge murder.

The WCPO Conviction Integrity Unit Review of the Atkins Case

The Conviction Integrity Unit review of the case has revealed that Billie Rutledge was likely killed because he was a potential witness in a homicide case. No eyewitness or physical evidence linked Mr. Atkins to Mr. Rutledge's death. No reliable information links Mr. Atkins to the prior homicide. Three male suspects related to the Rutledge homicide indicated that they did not know Atkins. In the immediate aftermath of Rutledge's death, when the three suspects were asked who killed Rutledge, they accused each other, not Atkins.

While the CIU finds the trial witnesses to be credible in their accounts of Mr. Atkins's admission to the homicide,



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the CIU findings establish that Mr. Atkins should be granted relief based upon the new evidence. On June 7, 2005, Mr. Atkins was a suspect in a carjacking. On June 9, 2005, he was released from jail when the victim declined to press charges. As soon as he was released, Mr. Atkins went to a home and visited with the three witnesses, and while inebriated, admitted to the carjacking. He became irate and asked his former girlfriend if she was going to report him to the police. His concern about being reported to the authorities informs the context for his statements to the three witnesses about the stretcher murder: "Have you been watching the news?" "This is what we do with witnesses."

While Atkins may have committed the carjacking in June of 2005, there is no credible evidence that supports that he had any involvement in Billie Rutledge's death. In July 2021, Mr. Atkins passed a polygraph arranged by the CIU. He was found to be non-deceptive in his denial of shooting Rutledge or being present when Rutledge was shot. On February 4, 2022, an order dismissing all charges in the case was granted and entered by Judge Shannon N. Walker dismissing the case. On February 4, 2022, Mr. Atkins was released from the Michigan Department of Corrections Kinross Correctional Facility.

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