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JUDGE FINDS EVIDENCE INSUFFICIENT TO CONVICT LADSON MAN OF RACING IN FOUR VEHICLE CRASH WHICH RESULTED IN THREE DEATHS

Charleston, S.C. ---Following two days of testimony, the Honorable Bentley Price dismissed charges against a Ladson man on trial for his role in a deadly collision in North Charleston. Lawrence Maurice Ravenel was accused of racing, reckless homicide, and hit and run following a four-vehicle crash that left three adults dead and critically injured four juveniles.

Witnesses testified that Ravenel and his cousin, Elijah Simmons, were racing on Dorchester Road near Industrial Avenue in North Charleston in the early evening on May 13, 2017. During the race, Simmons lost control of his Chevrolet Camaro and sideswiped an approaching CARTA bus carrying passengers. The car then careened headlong into a Buick sedan, driven by Neil Holmes, which was behind the bus. Phyllis Hughes and her four grandchildren were also in the Buick. Simmons, Holmes and Hughes were killed in the crash, while the four juveniles were treated at a local hospital.

Video from the bus captured the scene as the two cousins' cars barreled toward it. An eyewitness in traffic with the cousins prior to the collision reported that the two vehicles sped around her. Once they passed her, they got into adjacent lanes and accelerated rapidly, with the Maxima outpacing the Camaro. Shortly thereafter, the Camaro, driven by Simmons, slammed into the side of the bus while Ravenel's Nissan Maxima, in the lane adjacent to Simmons, escaped unscathed. The same eyewitness said she saw the Maxima quickly turn around and return to the scene, where Ravenel rushed to Simmons in the damaged Camaro. Ravenel did not provide his information to officers who arrived on scene or report his role in the crash, both affirmative duties that apply to all drivers involved in an accident.

An officer explained that Simmons' Camaro was travelling at 99 m.p.h. only seconds before its driver lost control, as the car's black box recorded its exact speed. Video from traffic cameras in the area showed the cars in adjacent lanes and accelerating less than a quarter-mile before the collision, and accident reconstruction based on those videos showed an acceleration from 45 m.p.h. to 93 in just .22 miles. Video evidence was consistent that,

although in adjacent lanes, the Simmons was trying to catch up to and overtake the Defendant—which outpaced it—before the collision.

After the State presented its witnesses, the Judge Price determined that no evidence showed that Ravenel and Simmons made an agreement to race, only that two adjacent cars were speeding beside each other. The judge further determined that because the State demonstrated that Ravenel was not physically involved in the actual collision, Ravenel was not criminally responsible for the deaths and had no duty to remain at the scene. The State argued that without the race, the crash never would have happened. Because the eyewitness testimony and video evidence supported a reasonable conclusion that the two cousins were racing, the State maintained that the race was the cause of death, that the defendant was unquestionably involved in the accident, and had a duty to remain at the scene as a non-contact contributor. The judge granted a directed verdict of “*not guilty*” against the State and in favor of the defendant. In this case, as in all cases where a verdict of “*not guilty*” is directed, by the court, the assembled jury was precluded from deciding the case.

DuTremble praised investigators from the North Charleston Police Department, led by Officer Theodore Gorman, that DuTremble said gathered evidence of the two cars “neck-and-neck” for nearly a mile before the collision.

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