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For Immediate Release
April 23, 2025

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MAN SENTENCED TO 55 YEARS FOR THE MURDER OF YOUNG HOLLYWOOD WOMAN

Charleston, S.C.— Solicitor Scarlett A. Wilson announced that on the Monday morning of his scheduled trial, Javon Lamar Murray pled guilty to the murder of 21-year-old Ruhjanae “Tallie” Gibbs, of Hollywood, S.C. The Honorable Judge Maite Murphy sentenced Murray to 55 years in prison. Assistant Solicitors Sara B. Bozarth and Liane D. Kozik prosecuted the case. Solicitor Wilson stated, “Judge Murphy sent a powerful message with this sentence. Even though the jury was not called upon to render a verdict, without jurors waiting in the wings, this guilty plea would never have happened.”

On August 8, 2019, between the hours of 10:55pm and midnight, Javon Murray shot and killed Ruhjanae Gibbs on Walking Horse Rd. and Churchill Flats Rd., in Hollywood, S.C. Facebook messages revealed Murray, masquerading as their mutual friend, lured Gibbs to his house that night. Additional records from Murray’s phone documented communications from Murray to his associates, including messages where he stated his intentions to commit an armed robbery that night. The last sighting of Gibbs and Murray was captured on surveillance footage from Meggett Town Hall. The footage showed Gibbs and Murray in her father’s truck at 10:55pm.

Shortly thereafter, Murray shot Gibbs while she was driving, causing her to drive off the road into a ditch. Murray then shot her three more times, and again in the head, for a total of six gunshot wounds. After shooting her, he removed her shirt, dragged her body across the street, and disposed of her body in the marsh. Murray then abandoned the truck and fled to his house, three miles away from the crime scene. A search of the truck revealed Murray’s cell phone, his ID, social security card, and debit cards.

Murray provided law enforcement with a myriad of inconsistent and demonstrably false stories. Investigators spent the next months tracking down leads, talking to potential witnesses, and attempting to verify Murray’s story and alibis. All evidence pointed back to Murray. On multiple occasions, Murray claimed that he did not know Gibbs, never heard of her, and was never around her. Forensic testing of Gibbs’s vaginal swabs, however, confirmed the presence of Murray’s DNA.

At sentencing, Gibbs’s family addressed the Court. Assistant Solicitor Sara B. Bozarth read poignant portions from Gibbs’s journal, which was recovered after her death. In her journal, Gibbs wrote, “All I want in life is stability, wealth, happiness, and self-love.”

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