

State of South Carolina

Charleston County
101 Meeting Street, Suite 400
Charleston, SC 29401
Phone (843) 958-1900
Fax (843) 958-1905



Berkeley County
300-B California Avenue
Moncks Corner, SC 29461
Phone (843) 723-3800 ext. 4529
Fax (843) 719-4588

SCARLETT A. WILSON
Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

JUDGE SENTENCES MAN TO 45 YEARS IN PRISON FOLLOWING MURDER CONVICTION

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Contact: Ashley Kay
kaya@scsolicitor9.org

Charleston, S.C.— Solicitor Scarlett A. Wilson announced that the Honorable Thomas J. Rode sentenced Willie Leo Darby to incarceration for 45 years following the murder of his husband, Michael Warren on November 12, 2021. The Defendant was convicted of Murder and Possession of a Weapon During the Commission of a Violent Crime by a Charleston County jury on September 12, 2025 following nearly 5 days of trial.

Assistant Solicitors Ashleigh Brown and Jordan Norvell presented the State's case which included testimony from North Charleston Detectives George Vantine and Charity Steinbrunner as well as a SLED firearms analyst and Detective Jerome De Sheers of the NCPD FBI Task Force. Detective Vantine led an investigation that focused on the Defendant as the main suspect from the start. Testimony from family and friends of the victim explained the couple had married in March of 2021 but had separated shortly before the November 12, 2021 murder. Evidence showed a 911 call for gunshots came from the Palmetto Grove Apartment Complex on November 12, 2021 around 3:05pm, however, officers were unable to locate any witnesses at that time. The next day, November 13, 2021, the victim was found deceased in his apartment by his parents. Through the investigation, Detectives learned of the Defendant as a suspect. His vehicle was seen on surveillance footage entering the apartment complex around 2:41pm and was seen leaving the complex one minute before the 911 call. His location was corroborated by call detail records from his phone provider that showed his movements before and after the murder. Further, call detail records of the victim showed his phone traveling with the Defendant after the murder. Detectives located two .22 caliber cartridge casings on scene near the victim's body and three live .22 caliber bullets with the same headstamp were located in the Defendant's vehicle the day after the murder. The Defendant provided a statement to law enforcement where he told detectives he had not seen the victim since their separation a week or two prior to the murder, he had not talked to him in days, and he did not go to the apartment the day of the murder.

At the time of this murder, the Defendant had outstanding warrants for Attempted Strong Arm Robbery and Assault & Battery 1st Degree. As Assistant Solicitor Brown stated during sentencing, this was a heinous, personal and violent attack on the Defendant's spouse. The State thanks North Charleston Police Department for a thorough investigation, Solicitor's Office Investigators Jennifer Butler and Dustin Morris for coordinating with the prosecution, and most importantly, the Keitt family for their sincere and incredible strength in the face of this senseless murder.

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