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Page 1 of 1

Attorney General Steve Marshall Announces Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals Reinstates Death Sentence in St. Clair County

(Montgomery, Ala) – Attorney General Steve Marshall announced that the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit reversed an order vacating the death sentence Marcus Bernard Williams received for capital murder. Williams was convicted in the St. Clair County Circuit Court in 1999.

The evidence at trial proved that Williams raped and murdered Melanie Rowell, a 20-year-old single mother of two. In the middle of the night, Williams broke into Rowell’s home, checked to see that her children were sleeping, and then raped and strangled her to death at knifepoint for over fifteen minutes. Rowell’s toddlers discovered her half-naked body the next morning. After hearing Williams’s confession and forensic evidence linking Williams to the scene, the jury voted to convict him of capital murder and recommended the death penalty by a vote of eleven to one.

A federal court had previously ordered Williams’s sentence to be vacated on the ground that his defense attorneys should have argued that his compulsive “hypersexuality” diminished his culpability for the crime. The State countered that no jury would look more favorably on a defendant because he has an irresistible compulsion to rape; in fact, pursuing that defense would have opened the door to evidence of another sexual assault Williams committed just weeks after killing Melanie Rowell.

Williams won before the Northern District of Alabama and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. But the Attorney General’s Office successfully persuaded the U.S. Supreme Court to vacate and remand the case. This time, the Eleventh Circuit agreed with the State and voted to reinstate Williams’s death sentence on April 3, 2026.

Attorney General Marshall commended the Solicitor General Division and the Capital Litigation Division for their tireless efforts to see justice done for Melanie Rowell and her family.

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