



YAVAPAI COUNTY ATTORNEY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Prescott Man Sentenced to Life in Prison For Kidnapping and Burying Wife Alive

Yavapai County Attorney Dennis McGrane announced that on May 9, 2024, Yavapai County Superior Court Judge David Mackey sentenced David Michael Pagniano, 62, of Prescott, to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the murder of his wife Sandra Pagniano.

County Attorney McGrane stated, “My Office pursued the death penalty in this case because of the horrific circumstances surrounding the abduction and murder of a young mother. Sandra was kidnapped from her home while her children slept nearby, bound in packing tape, driven to a remote location and buried alive. The evidence revealed she vigorously struggled while she was in the grave, and was likely conscious for up to five minutes after being buried. I hope the life sentence brings some closure to the victim’s family. I want to be clear that my Office will vigorously prosecute anyone who commits a violent crime in Yavapai County and we will continue to pursue the death penalty in appropriate cases.”

County Attorney Dennis McGrane thanked Sheriff David Rhodes and the Yavapai County Sheriff’s Office for an incredibly thorough investigation into the murder, and commended prosecutors Casi Harris and Bill Hughes for meticulously preparing the case for trial.

The Sheriff’s Office began investigating after Pagniano’s wife, Sandra, disappeared under suspicious circumstances during a contentious divorce. After a massive YCSO manhunt and investigation, Sandra’s body was found bound and gagged in packing tape in a hand-dug grave in a remote area north of Prescott, Arizona. The medical examiner determined Sandra had been buried alive. Cell phone analysis showed Pagniano was in the vicinity of the gravesite in the days before victim’s death as well as the night she went missing. Detectives recovered two notes that were filed in the divorce proceeding after Sandra’s disappearance, purportedly written by Sandra, that said she was leaving and giving Pagniano her vehicles, house, and custody of their children. A forensic examination of the notes revealed they had actually been written by Pagniano.

The Yavapai County Attorney’s Office alleged the death penalty in this case. On the eve of trial, Pagniano decided to plead guilty and let the judge decide his sentence, without any plea agreement from the County Attorney’s Office. In addition to the life sentence, Pagniano was also sentenced to serve an additional 16.5 years in prison for the crimes of Kidnapping, Forgery, and Fraud Schemes.

Criminal Division

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Civil Division

(928) 771-3338

Bad Check Program

(928) 771-3490

Photo attached: David Michael Pagniano

