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Clayton Lamont Howard receives 40 day jail sentence for abusing a corpse

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that 56-year-old Clayton Lamont Howard received a 40 day jail sentence and was put on two years of formal probation after a jury unanimously convicted him of abusing the corpse of a woman who died of an accidental drug overdose.

On November 26, 2019, the jury found Mr. Howard guilty of two counts of abuse of a corpse in the second degree, a Class C felony.

The jury found that by concealing the body of 59-year-old Nita Mangum with clothing, plastic totes, a mattress and then having sex on that mattress with a different woman, Mr. Howard intentionally treated her corpse in a manner not generally recognized by the community and convicted him of two counts of abuse of a corpse in the second degree.

The court ordered that Mr. Howard not receive any sentencing credits, including credits for time already served, which means he will serve the jail sentence day-for-day.

The court also imposed a \$400 fine and 200 hours of community service and ordered Mr. Howard to undergo a drug and alcohol evaluation and complete any treatment that may be recommended. If at any point, Mr. Howard is found in violation of his probation, he could receive an additional jail sentence.

During its sentencing recommendation, the state asked the court to reduce the Class C felony convictions to Class A misdemeanor convictions, which could have made Mr. Howard eligible for a sentence of nearly two years in jail.

"The state believes the community is at risk when Mr. Howard is out of custody," said Multnomah County Senior Deputy District Attorney Traci Anderson, who prosecuted this case. "We could not have, with any good conscience, asked for a sentence that would have provided anything less than complete community safety. Based on his previous convictions, Mr. Howard has demonstrated he is not amenable to treatment and that he does not do well while being supervised on either parole or probation."

This investigation started on March 22, 2019 when family members of Ms. Magnum called 9-1-1 to report her missing.

"He has hurt several different people..." a family member of Ms. Mangum said by phone during today's sentencing hearing. "He could have called the police, but he didn't. I need him to know that he's hurt a lot of our family."

The Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office determined Ms. Mangum died on Thursday March 21, 2019 because of an accidental drug overdose.

During the investigation, which was led by Portland Police Bureau Homicide Detective Todd Gradwahl, law enforcement learned Mr. Howard - in violation of his parole - was living with Ms. Magnum.

About a week before her death, Ms. Magnum allowed a woman to move into her apartment.

The new roommate testified that Mr. Howard immediately provided her with alcohol and methamphetamine, which exacerbated her substance abuse disorders.

Very late at night on Wednesday March 20, 2019, the roommate went to sleep in the living room. When she woke up several hours later on March 21, 2019, she asked Mr. Howard about Ms. Mangum's whereabouts.

Mr. Howard claimed that Ms. Mangum had gone to the coast with a man named “Elvis” and that she would be returning in a couple of days, according to trial testimony.

“That was a lie,” said SDDA Anderson. “After Ms. Mangum died, Mr. Howard buried her. He abandoned her and went on to use drugs and to repeatedly have sex with the other woman on the very mattress that hid Ms. Magnum.”

During the investigation, law enforcement learned that after her death, Mr. Howard took Ms. Mangum’s bank cards and went to various locations to get drug money.

Ms. Magnum’s family members went to her apartment on March 22, 2019 to check on her. When they arrived, they found Mr. Howard and the other woman inside the apartment. The family members observed Ms. Magnum’s purse and cane. They became increasingly worried about her welfare and called 9-1-1.

When police arrived, Mr. Howard continued to deny knowing Ms. Magnum’s location and denied being in possession of any of her belongings. However, during trial, two of the first responding officers testified that Ms. Mangum’s family called her cellphone, which rang in the presence of police and was found in Mr. Howard’s pocket.

Police also found Mr. Howard in possession of Ms. Magnum’s gold rings at the time of his arrest.

During trial, Mr. Howard testified that he did not call 9-1-1 after finding Ms. Mangum’s body because his parole officer had previously ordered him not to have contact with Ms. Mangum and that he feared he would be arrested if law enforcement found him inside her apartment.

During that same testimony, Mr. Howard confirmed he has prior felony convictions for rape in the first degree, robbery in the first degree and burglary in the first degree.

Furthermore, he testified that upon finding Ms. Mangum deceased, he attempted to render first aid and that the reason he covered her body was to fulfill a “dying declaration,” despite his earlier admission to police that he hid her body to avoid going to jail.

The jury acquitted Mr. Howard of one count of identity theft.

It was the state’s theory that Mr. Howard committed the crime of identity theft by using Ms. Mangum’s bank cards, without permission, hours after her death to either attempt to withdraw money from her accounts or to check the account balances on at least 15 separate occasions.

Prior to closing arguments, the court granted a judgment of acquittal on Count 4 of the indictment, which charged Mr. Howard with one count of attempted theft in the second degree for allegedly having plans to pawn Ms. Mangum’s jewelry after her death.

On November 21, 2019, Judge Thomas M. Ryan found Mr. Howard in contempt of court for using obscene language towards a witness upon the conclusion of her testimony. The court’s order is documented in the Oregon eCourt Information (OEI) system under case number 19CN05370.

The Multnomah County District Attorney’s Office recognizes PPB Homicide Detective Todd Gradwahl and the other members of the Portland Police Bureau for their dedicated efforts investigating this case. Furthermore, the District Attorney’s Office recognizes Victim Advocate Emily Hyde for the support and advocacy she provide to Ms. Magnum’s family and the witnesses in this case.

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