



Office of the District Attorney

Fourth Prosecutorial District

Duplin County Courthouse
PO Box 719
Kenansville, NC 28349-0719

G. Dewey Hudson
District Attorney

Duplin County
910-296-1231
Jones County
252-448-1852
Onslow County
910-455-8008
Sampson County
910-592-5143

PRESS RELEASE

Today, I will dismiss the charges against Levon Junior Jones in Duplin County. Mr. Jones had been serving a sentence in the North Carolina Department of Correction for the murder and robbery of Lemon Grady that occurred in Duplin County on February 27, 1987. In November 1993, Jones was convicted by a jury of First Degree Murder, Robbery with a Dangerous Weapon, and Conspiracy. Jones was sentenced to death for the murder conviction. In February 1996, the North Carolina Supreme Court upheld and affirmed Mr. Jones conviction and death sentence.

In 2006, attorneys for Mr. Jones filed motions in Federal District Court alleging that his trial counsel had been ineffective. After holding several evidentiary hearings on the matter, the Honorable Terrence W. Boyle, United States District Judge issued an order finding that Mr. Jones trial counsel had been deficient and vacated Mr. Jones convictions. Judge Boyle further ordered that Jones be given a new trial on the state murder and robbery charges.

In January 2007, Mr. Jones was returned to Duplin County and the Office of the Capital Defender was appointed to represent Jones on the state charges. At that time, the District Attorney's Office decided that it would not seek the death penalty against Mr. Jones for the death of Lemon Grady. However, because this crime occurred before the Structured Sentencing Act went into effect, Jones would have been eligible for parole after 20 years for a conviction of First Degree Murder. Mr. Jones has been in continuous custody since his arrest in the case on August 14, 1992. Even had Jones been tried and convicted by a new jury of first degree murder, he would still be automatically eligible for parole once he had served a 20 year sentence.

In March 2008, attorneys for Jones provided the District Attorney's office an affidavit from Lovely Lorden, the key witness at the original trial of Jones in 1993. In that sworn statement, Lorden contradicted some of her previous testimony as to the events of February 27, 1987, the night Lemon Grady was killed. Since making this new statement, Lorden has been unwilling to speak with law enforcement officers about her prior trial testimony or the affidavit she signed in December of 2007.

After reviewing all the available evidence and testimony in the matter, it appears that further proceedings against Mr. Jones would hinge upon the testimony and credibility of Ms. Lorden. Ms. Lorden's recollection of the events, recent contradictions, and reluctance to cooperate with law enforcement would have made it impossible at this time to secure another conviction against Mr. Jones for the murder and robbery of Lemon Grady. This is especially true since the murder occurred more than 20 years ago.

Law Enforcement and I believe that Levon Jones received a fair and just trial and that he was rightfully convicted. Jones' case was thoroughly reviewed by the North Carolina Supreme Court, and his convictions were upheld by that court in February 1996. We further believe that Ms. Lorden was completely truthful in her trial testimony. In fact, On August 3, 1992 Ms. Lovely Lorden voluntarily submitted to a polygraph test administered by State Bureau of investigation Special Agent J.R. Allen as to the truthfulness of statements about Levon Jones' involvement in the murder of Lemon Grady, and Lorden passed the polygraph test. At trial, Lorden was cross examined by attorneys representing Jones, and jurors had the opportunity to carefully weigh her testimony and determine her credibility. Ms. Lorden has been working with law enforcement for many years and has provided valuable information that has led to the arrest and conviction of other persons. Law enforcement officers who have worked with Ms. Lorden have always found her to have been completely truthful and forthcoming until now. The information she has provided to law enforcement officers has been independently corroborated and verified.

Ms. Lorden approached law enforcement officers investigating the death of Lemon Grady in August of 1990 and informed them of information regarding the murder. She stated that she was with Jones, Larry Lamb and Ernest Matthews when they went to Lemon Grady's house and robbed and murdered him. Until that time, law enforcement had been unable to solve this brutal crime. In her original statement and subsequent testimony, she even implicated herself in that she said Jones gave her some of the stolen money. The information provided by Ms. Lorden was independently investigated and verified by law enforcement officers. In fact, Ernest Matthews, one of the three suspects identified by Lorden, pled guilty to second degree murder. The investigation of Mr. Jones as the suspect in the death of Lemon Grady did not rest solely on information provided by Ms. Lorden. Law enforcement officers conducted a complete and thorough investigation of Grady's death, interviewing numerous witnesses and exhausting countless leads. However, until law enforcement officers received information from Lorden they had been unable to make any arrests for this violent crime. With the new information provided by Lorden, law enforcement officers were able to interview new witnesses and further corroborate the statements made by Lorden. One of those witnesses reported that Jones made an incriminating statement regarding the murder of Grady. Unfortunately, both that witness and a lead investigator in this case have passed away in the 15 years since the original trial of the case.

We contend that Lovely Lorden has withdrawn her previous testimony from fear of retaliation from the defendant. At the time of Mr. Grady's murder, Jones had an extensive criminal history of violent crimes. Additionally, independent witnesses placed Jones with the co-defendants at the time of the crime.

Lorden noted that she had not previously come forward because of her fears of Jones. Despite her fear, Lorden testified at the trial in November 1993 that she was afraid of what the defendant would do to her when he was released from prison. At the time Lorden approached law enforcement with information linking Jones to the murder of Grady, Jones was serving a sentence in the Department of Correction for an unrelated felony assault. Following the murder of Lemon Grady, Jones had been convicted of assault with a deadly weapon with the intent to kill.

At the original murder trial, jurors found as an aggravating circumstance that the defendant had previously been convicted of a violent felony. Based upon the defendant lengthy criminal history and his previous relationship with Lovely Lorden, her fears were justified. Furthermore, Lorden was aware that Jones would be eligible for parole and might seek retribution against her for his incarceration.

It has taken 15 years for the court system to make the determination that Mr. Jones original counsel was ineffective. As a result of this delay, the State has been severely handcuffed in its obligation to prosecute Mr. Jones for the murder of Lemon Grady. This extensive delay has resulted in the death of key witnesses in the case. Their information and assistance was valuable in the investigation and prosecution of this case.

Any time the court system takes so long to resolve these important legal issues, the DA's office is placed in a difficult position. Unless changes are made to address these issues in a more timely fashion, prosecutors will continue to be hampered in seeing that cases are brought to a final resolution and that justice is served.