

REAL-TIME NEWS FROM HUNTSVILLE

Man sentenced for dismembering girlfriend's body with power saw, dumping her behind store

Updated Feb 26;
Posted Feb 26



William Payton arrives at his sentencing in the Madison County Courthouse Feb. 26, 2018.

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By **Ashley Remkus**, aremkus@al.com

A man has been sentenced to prison for dismembering his girlfriend's body and leaving the remains behind a south Huntsville shopping center.

Earlier this month, a Madison County jury convicted William Lewis Payton, 44, of corpse abuse. Payton was found guilty of dismembering Tonya Lynn Amerson's body. The 27-year-old victim was Payton's girlfriend.

During a hearing this afternoon, Circuit Judge James Smith sentenced Payton to spend 40 years in prison. Payton also is required to pay court costs and fees. Two witnesses, including Payton's mother, spoke on his behalf. The victim's family wrote letters to the judge.

Payton initially was charged with murder in Amerson's death. But, because scientists haven't been able to determine how she died, that case was dropped.

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"We still don't know exactly what happened to Tonya," said Madison County Prosecutor Joshua Ballinger at today's sentencing. He said Amerson could have been murdered or died of a drug overdose.



"If she was dying from a drug overdose, all (Payton) had to do was make one phone call and she could have medical assistance there," Ballinger said. "If he found her already dead, it would have took one phone call and he could have the proper authorities there."

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"It would have been bad enough if he had done nothing," Ballinger continued. "But he went beyond that -- he took a power saw, chopped her in half, cut her arms off, stuffed her in trash bags, stuck her in boxes and dumped her behind Target."

Amerson's body was found behind the Target store at the Valley Bend Shopping Center in Jones Valley the morning of Oct. 16, 2015.

"That's a level of depravity you only see in a horror movie," Ballinger said. "That's not something you see on Carl T. Jones Drive here in Madison County."



Pleas for leniency

Speaking on behalf of her son, Payton's mother described "a good kid," and a hard worker who devoted much of his life to God as a layperson Jehovah's Witness. She talked about Payton's love for his children -- he has eight, including two with Amerson.

"William loved Tonya very much," he mother told Judge Smith.

Defense attorney Shannon Moore asked the judge for leniency, noting the victim's own parents wanted a lenient sentence for Payton. Moore also described to the judge Payton's health problems, including sciatica, which can cause pain the back and legs.

Speaking to the judge on his own behalf, Payton said he has high blood pressure. He said his blood pressure was so high -- 218/140 -- during the trial that he can't remember what happened in court. Payton also mentioned lawsuits, a cover up in Madison County, being bullied by a sheriff's deputy and having ineffective counsel.

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He denied killing or dismembering Amerson.

Payton has two prior felonies in Madison County. He also faces additional criminal charges of child abuse and sodomy in neighboring Marshall County. He's set for trial April 30 on one count each of sodomy and sexual abuse of a child younger than 12.

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