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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

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I. Introduction

Good morning and thank you all for being here today. My name is Tim Heaphy and I'm the United States Attorney for the Western District of Virginia.

This morning in the courtroom upstairs in this building, Chief Judge Glen Conrad sentenced both Nakia Heath Keller and Lorie Taylor Keller to mandatory terms of life in prison with no chance of parole for their joint commission of the murders of Dennis Taylor, Allaina Taylor, and Kaylee Whetzel in October of 2009. I want to talk briefly about the

horrific facts and circumstances of this case, as well as the investigation which brought this matter to today's successful conclusion.

II. United States v. Nakia Heath Keller and Lorie Taylor Keller

The tragic events of this case grew out of an acrimonious divorce and custody battle between Lorie Taylor Keller and her ex-husband, Dennis Taylor. Dennis and Lorie were married in 1994. They had three children and lived together in this area of Virginia for years.

In 2009, Dennis and Lorie divorced. It was a particularly messy divorce, one characterized by disputes between them about money and child custody. A judge in Rockingham County resolved those disputes, which unfolded over multiple hearings and court proceedings.

Lorie Taylor didn't fare well in these disputes in court. The judge awarded custody of their three children to their father - Dennis Taylor. The basis of the court's decision was primarily Lorie's relationship with Nakia Keller, who had been convicted years before of child endangerment. The judge also ordered Lorie to pay Dennis a sum of

money that the court determined she owed him.

Rather than submit to the judge's order and allow her children to live with their father, Lorie decided to kill her ex-husband Dennis Taylor. She enlisted the help of a willing partner - her then-boyfriend Nakia Keller. Sometime in 2009, Lorie and Nakia began plotting to kill Dennis Taylor. They obtained a 9mm pistol that would later become the murder weapon. They discussed various scenarios about how to commit the murders, including plans on how to gain entry into the residence. Significantly, they also discussed the prospect of killing witnesses in an effort to get away with their sinister plans.

On October 23, 2009, their careful planning came to fruition. Sometime that evening, Lorie and Nakia Keller left their residence in Folks Run, Virginia and drove to a home in West Virginia where Dennis Taylor lived with his second wife, Allaina Taylor, and Allaina's daughter Kaylee, then 5 years old.

Lorie and Nakia entered the home. Using the 9mm pistol they bought months earlier, they shot and killed Dennis Taylor. They didn't,

however, stop there. They also killed Allaina Taylor, shooting her at point blank range in the back of her head. They then took the final, awful step of eliminating a final witness - an utterly defenseless five-year-old girl -- Kaylee Whetzel. They shot and killed Kaylee, shooting her in the head and leaving her body laying on top of her deceased mother and Dennis Taylor.

In an attempt to cover-up their awful crimes, Nakia and Lorie Keller set fire to the Taylors' home. They also discarded unspent bullets, and other items used in the murders along the roadside. Nakia Keller used an electric saw to cut the murder weapon into smaller pieces for the purpose of discarding it. Both defendants placed clothing worn during the murders and pieces of the murder weapon in an outhouse.

In order to establish alibis, the two instructed Lorie Keller's three children that if anyone asked, both Nakia and Lorie were home with the children on the night of the murders.

None of these efforts to conceal evidence and manufacture an alibi worked. Multiple agencies on both sides of the state line pursued a long

and thorough investigation. They recovered items of physical evidence, and they obtained information from dozens of witnesses. They literally pulled this investigation “out of the fire” - finding sufficient evidence to charge and ultimately bring to justice the people who were responsible for these terrible murders.

As a result of this thorough investigation, Lorie Ann Keller and Nakia Keller were charged with all three murders and other offenses in the United States District Court for the Western District of Virginia. On June 25, 2012, they both pleaded guilty pursuant to written agreements that required them to be sentenced to a mandatory term of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Today, Judge Conrad accepted those plea agreements and imposed the mandatory sentence - life without parole for each defendant. His sentence ensures that both of these defendants will remain in federal prison for the rest of their lives. Lorie Ann Keller and Nakia Keller will never again be free. They will be incarcerated as long as they live. They will never be eligible for parole. They will die in federal prison.

This is a harsh but just result for the heinous acts these defendants committed in October of 2009. It is an outcome made possible by the cooperative law enforcement efforts by a multitude of agencies, both state and federal, here in Virginia and in West Virginia.

III. Cooperative Investigation

From the moment the chief medical examiner of Hardy County, West Virginia made the determination that these three victims died as a result of gunshot wounds rather than fire, this case proved to be difficult.

Authorities in Hardy County, West Virginia, including the Hardy County Sheriff's Office and the Hardy County Prosecuting Attorney's Office collected crucial evidence early in the investigation that got the ball rolling on our federal case.

Later, the West Virginia State Police and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives brought the case to our office for federal prosecution and were critical in gathering the evidence needed to secure convictions in this difficult investigation.

I want to thank all those men and women who put their time and efforts into bringing justice to the victims' families. They answered the call and operated skillfully and effectively. They worked together to ensure that justice was done.

The investigation and prosecution of Nakia and Lorie Keller presented unique challenges. These investigators surmounted those challenges and are primarily responsible for the just result made official today. These life sentences could not have happened without the professional and cooperative manner in which these investigators went about their business.

As they always do, the ATF did a top-notch job in chasing down all leads and gathering the evidence needed to obtain a federal conviction.

I welcome ATF Special Agent in Charge Rich Marianos to say a few words about his agency's role in this investigation.

ATF SAC Marianos speaks

IV. Conclusion

Thank you, Rich and thank you to all the agents from the ATF who worked tirelessly to obtain justice for these victims.

The last thing I want to say is a word about the victims in this case. I am keenly aware that the sentences imposed today do not lessen the pain of the surviving families of Dennis, Allaina and Kaylee. The life sentences won't bring back their loved ones. This is and will always be a terrible tragedy which has caused and will continue to cause deep, awful pain and loss. Nothing that we do in court makes that go away.

I hope the families of these victims take some solace in knowing that those responsible for the deaths of their loved ones have been punished for their crimes and will never be free again. I know, however, that the pain remains. The loss endures. The sadness will continue forever. I realize that, and because of that my heart goes out to these families.

I thank you all for coming and we will now do our best to answer

any questions you may have.