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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: August 21, 2024
RE: State v Walter Javier Martinez

On Wednesday, August 21, 2024, Walter Javier Martinez, 19, entered a guilty plea for the charge of First Degree Murder before the Honorable Yolanda L. Curtin in the Circuit Court for Harford County.

Fact presented to the court in support of the plea showed that on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, a twenty-year-old female victim was found unconscious on the floor of her bedroom by her boyfriend and was bound at the wrists and with a phone charging cord wrapped tightly around her neck and mouth. Upon arrival of Emergency Medical Services, she was observed to be clearly deceased. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner ultimately ruled the victim's death a homicide by strangulation.

Investigation revealed that on the day of the incident, both the victim's boyfriend and the other family that resided in the home were at work, leaving the victim and Martinez alone in the residence for the first time. Martinez had only been residing in the home for approximately five days prior to the murder. Police observed the victim's purse and belongings scattered around the room, and it was ultimately determined that money was removed from her wallet, and her cell phone was missing. The victim's boyfriend also advised that on his way home, just prior to discovering the victim's body, he observed Martinez, walking down the street away from the residence. A cellular device ping of the victim's phone later put the device in the general location where Martinez was seen that day. The victim, who was diagnosed with high functioning autism, would often call her boyfriend when someone would knock on the door of their bedroom. During the time of the incident, the victim followed that pattern of behavior, and the murder was recorded on the boyfriend's voicemail and played in court in support of the plea. Martinez could be heard apologizing to the victim at the end of the recording.

DNA swabs were also taken from the victim's body, to include anal swabs. In addition, her underwear and shorts were also analyzed for the presence of DNA and compared against a known sample from Martinez. The DNA profile was consistent with the DNA of the defendant, Walter Martinez.

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Following his arrest, Martinez authored a letter while incarcerated at the Harford County Detention Center where he admitted to committing 4 murders, 2 rapes, and additional other crimes, which was also provided to the court in support of the plea.

During sentencing, the State asked the court to impose the agreed sentence of Life suspend all but seventy (70) years to serve. Pursuant to case law, due to the defendant's age (16) at the time of this offense, the State was unable to seek Life without Parole in this case. Defense Counsel for Martinez gave a brief history of the defendant's life in El Salvador and stated that the defendant illegally entered the United States by employing "cayotes" or smugglers in March 2022, just four months prior to this brutal murder. They also confirmed that Martinez was, in fact, a member of the MS-13 gang. Further, there is an active Immigrations and Customs Enforcement detainer, which would be in effect upon his release. Thus, Martinez may be subject to additional immigration proceedings and deportation at that time.

During the hearing, the victim's paternal grandmother, stepfather, and mother all gave victim impact statements to the court. During her remarks prior to handing down the sentence, the Honorable Judge Curtin stated that "it is unbearable to think what victims' families go through," and "in your words, you have conveyed the beauty of her life," referencing the victim. She ultimately imposed the agreed sentence of Life suspend all but seventy (70) years to serve with a period of five years of supervised probation upon release. She further commented that nothing that happened to this defendant in El Salvador gave him the right to do what he did and that, at this time, she did not think Martinez was a candidate for "any rehabilitative measures."

Following the guilty plea, State's Attorney Alison Healey issued the following statement: "This murder was one of the most brutal and heinous crimes I have ever prosecuted. No one deserves to suffer and die at the hands of a monster like this victim did. Additionally, this defendant, residing in our country illegally, had no legal right to be here, preying on the members of our communities, and perpetuating the same violent gang activity that he did in his own country. I commend the victim's family for their bravery today in delivering their statements to the court and facing this murderer. I recognize that no amount of time will ever be enough to take away the pain and suffering that this family has experienced as a result of Walter Martinez's horrific and criminal conduct, nor will any sentence bring this victim back to them."

State's Attorney Healey continued by thanking Assistant State's Attorney Gabriella Vazzana for being her Co-Counsel in this case and for her assistance in preparing this case for trial. She further commends Detective Shoffstall, Detective Soto, Lieutenant Persuhn and the entire Aberdeen Police Department for their remarkably thorough investigation of this case, which ultimately led to justice for a truly innocent victim.