



# Granville Ritchie sentenced to death for killing 9-year-old girl

By **Dan Sullivan**

The body of Felecia Williams was found off the Courtney Campbell Causeway five years ago. The man who raped and killed her will forfeit his own life.

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TAMPA — The same jury that found Granville Ritchie guilty of raping and murdering 9-year-old Felecia Williams decided Friday night that he should pay for his crimes with his life.

The panel of seven women and five men started deliberating just after 7 p.m. About three hours later, all 12 concluded that the 40-year-old man deserved the death penalty.

Their decision was announced just before 10 p.m. There were gasps in the courtroom.

"I'm feeling very relieved this is over," said the victim's mother Felecia Demerson afterward. "It's been a long five years. I got justice. I got exactly what I asked for."

Ritchie, as he had throughout the three-week trial, remained stone-faced as his fate was revealed.

It was the same jury who on Wednesday convicted him of killing the child in 2014. They spent the past two days in the penalty phase of the trial listening to witnesses and hearing arguments from the prosecution and defense.

Defense attorney Bjorn Brunvand said afterward that he was disappointed in the jury's decision, and called the death penalty barbaric.

"I feel horrible for the family of Felecia Williams," Brunvand said. "And I feel horrible for the family of Granville Ritchie."

To sway the jury, the state had to list the aggravating factors for why Ritchie should be sentenced to death. The defense had to lay out the mitigating factors for sparing his life.

Both sides also called two competing groups of expert witnesses to testify. They described two very different Granville Ritchies to the jury.

One was a man of low-intelligence who grew up in poverty and suffers from brain abnormalities. The other was a man who grew up in decent circumstances, who possesses a normal brain but dangerous antisocial tendencies.

Prosecutors cited Felecia's age, her sexual assault and the heinous nature of the crime as reasons for imposing the death penalty.

"This defendant is not charged with robbery," Harmon said in his closing. "But he clearly robbed this little girl. He robbed her of her innocence and he robbed her of her life."

The defense gave jurors a list of a dozen mitigating circumstances, reasons to pull away from death as a punishment. The death penalty, argued defense attorney Daniel Hernandez, is intended to punish the most heinous crimes.

"I am in no way minimizing what happened to this little girl," he said. "But I would suggest to you that there are certain types of murders that are worse than this."

He added: ""Regardless of your vote, he will leave Florida state prison in a coffin."

The girl left her Tampa home May 16, 2014, with Eboni Wiley. She was a neighbor and friend of Felecia's family and considered herself the girl's godmother. They went with a man Wiley had just met, Ritchie. They ended up at his mother's Temple Terrace apartment. Ritchie sent Wiley to buy marijuana, leaving the girl behind.

After Wiley departed, the state said Ritchie raped and strangled the girl. The state theorized that he concealed her body in a suitcase and later that night drove it to the Courtney Campbell Causeway, where he dumped her into the water. Her body was found the next day, nude and battered by the rocks and mangroves.

The defense's experts, psychologist Hyman Eisenstein and Dr. Joseph Wu, a medical doctor, opined that Ritchie displayed signs of brain damage and that brain exams show signs of injury, which could affect his ability to think and behave.

The state called a doctor who said Ritchie's brain is perfectly normal, that any brain abnormalities are superficial. Psychiatrist Emily Lazarou testified that Ritchie has anti-social personality disorder. He is deceitful, manipulative of other people, and lacking in remorse.

The defense played a documentary-style video featuring interviews with dozens of Ritchie's family and relatives in Jamaica.

They described him as intelligent, ambitious. A man who strove to help people the poverty-stricken and crime-plagued neighborhood where he grew up.

The defense will be able to ask the judge to throw out the death sentence at a future court hearing before the penalty becomes official.

Surrounded by her family members, Demerson embraced the prosecutors as she walked out of court.

“Everyone on that jury gave a care to say that man deserves exactly what he gets,” she said. “As long as I know he’s in that box for the rest of his life, that’s all I care about.”

Source:

[https://www.tampabay.com/news/hillsborough/2019/09/27/hillsborough-jury-weighs-life-or-death-for-child-killer-granville-ritchie/?ads=a&utm\\_expid=.OkR8\\_rI9TJCniE4SYU689w.1&utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://www.tampabay.com/news/hillsborough/2019/09/27/hillsborough-jury-weighs-life-or-death-for-child-killer-granville-ritchie/?ads=a&utm_expid=.OkR8_rI9TJCniE4SYU689w.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)