

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Defendant to Serve Time in Prison for Leaving Puppies to Die on Roadside

State vs. Amber Kay Higdon

September 19, 2024 – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that on September 12 Amber Kay Higdon, 31, of Canton, entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to seven counts of aggravated cruelty to animals. Superior Court Judge Shannon Wallace sentenced Higdon to 10 years with the first two years to serve in confinement and the remainder to serve on probation.

Charges stem from an investigation that began on July 27, 2023, when a concerned citizen found seven deceased puppies abandoned in a pink plastic tote on the side of Pine Lane near Univeter Road in Canton. The discovery was made at approximately 8:30 p.m.

The Cherokee County Marshal's Office determined that earlier the same day Higdon came to the Cherokee County Animal Shelter to turn in seven puppies, which were about three weeks old. When a shelter employee asked Higdon to provide her driver's license, she left the shelter to retrieve the license but did not return.

Instead, Higdon got into a vehicle and left with the seven puppies. As she sat in the traveling vehicle, Higdon became annoyed with the sound of the whining puppies and instructed the driver to pull over. Higdon then removed the plastic tote containing the puppies and left it on the side of the road, with no food, water, or shelter. The puppies were too small to climb out of the tote, which was not covered with a lid.

According to the driver, who is a co-defendant in this case, when Higdon returned to the vehicle, she expressed relief that she could no longer hear the puppies whimpering and the vehicle was quiet.

On July 27, 2023, the temperature reached a high of 95 degrees, and the puppies were left on the side of the road in direct sunlight. They remained there for more than six hours before a passerby discovered the tote.

A necropsy performed at the University of Georgia determined that the puppies died from pulmonary edema, pulmonary hemorrhage, and cardiac arrest.

"The defendant committed a crime against one of the most vulnerable groups in our society," said Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy, who prosecuted this case on behalf of the State. "Animals rely on us as humans for all their needs, and the defendant discarded these puppies on the side of the road as if they were trash. The defendant's action led to an extremely painful death for seven innocent puppies, which no living being deserves to endure."

When officers spoke to Higdon, she admitted to leaving the puppies on the side of the road, but said she thought someone else would find them and take care of them.

The State argued for a sentence of 20 years with the first 10 years to serve in confinement and the remainder to serve on probation. The Defense recommended 10 years, with one year to serve in confinement and the remainder on probation.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Wallace referenced mitigating factors and sentenced Higdon to 10 years with the first two years to serve, in addition to numerous special conditions including payment of a fine, restitution, and attorney fees. Higdon is also forbidden to own, possess, or have contact with any animals during probation.

“Given the nature of these charges and the pain and suffering this defendant caused these puppies, prison time is justified and sends a clear message that Cherokee County does not tolerate crimes against animals,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “The Cherokee County Marshal’s Office did a phenomenal job investigating this crime to ensure successful prosecution. Our hope is that this defendant will never be able to harm another animal.”

The co-defendant accepted responsibility by pleading guilty for her part in this crime and was sentenced to straight probation.

In Cherokee County if you have concerns about animal neglect or abuse, call the Cherokee County Marshal’s Office at 678-493-4080. In case of emergency, call 911.

This case was investigated by the Cherokee County Marshal’s Office and prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy, Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit.

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The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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