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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monroe County Man Pleads Guilty to Woodstock Murder, Sentenced to Life in Prison *State vs. Triston James Sexton*

CANTON, GA (July 16, 2026) – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that Triston James Sexton, 27, of Forsyth, Monroe County, was sentenced on July 15 to life in prison after entering a negotiated guilty plea to malice murder and possession of a knife during the commission of a felony.

During the sentencing hearing, Assistant District Attorney Rebecca Visockis presented the facts of the case as follows. Just after 4 a.m. on Sept. 19, 2024, Woodstock Police officers responded to a 911 call reporting a stabbing at the Avonlea Apartments in the Towne Lake area of Woodstock.

The stabbing victim, David Courtney Phelps, 55, of Atlanta, was transported to a hospital, where he later died from multiple injuries to his heart and lungs. He had been stabbed approximately 20 times while lying in his bed.

When officers arrived, Sexton was outside the apartment building, with a blood-stained chef's knife on a nearby bench. The knife was later identified as the murder weapon.

Sexton and Phelps were part of a sober living program and had been roommates for approximately one month. The three other occupants of the apartment told investigators they were unaware of any prior conflicts with the men. Phelps was set to leave the sober living program later that week.

On the night of the murder, the roommates awoke to the victim's screams and entered the bedroom to find the defendant standing over him holding a knife.

Sexton told investigators the victim had sexually assaulted him, but no evidence supported that claim. The other three roommates said that Sexton had exhibited increasingly erratic behavior in the days leading up to the murder, including staying awake late at night and not taking his prescribed medication.

Surveillance footage from the apartment's living room showed Sexton pacing repeatedly throughout the early morning hours. At one point, he left briefly and returned. Minutes later, the video recorded him walking through the apartment carrying a knife.

"The evidence showed this was a merciless and deliberate attack – not an impulsive act. For David, the attack inflicted extraordinary pain, fear, and suffering. The sheer number of wounds and the circumstances of the killing made the defendant's intent unmistakable," said Assistant District Attorney Rebecca Visockis, who prosecuted this case on behalf of the State.

At the plea hearing, four members of the victim's family spoke, describing David as having an infectious and loving personality. Each of them expressed the tremendous loss they have experienced as a result of the brutal murder of their loved one.

The Defense argued that mental illness played a factor in the defendant's actions, but the State countered that although the defendant has experienced mental illness at various points in his life, his conduct on this day demonstrated intent and malice, not impulsiveness.

"This should have been a week ending in celebration for David as he transitioned to his next chapter of sober living, but it was instead marked by the tragic loss of his life, said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. "This sentence reflects the brutality of the defendant's actions and ensures that he will not be free to inflict harm on another innocent person again."

Superior Court Judge Jennifer L. Davis sentenced the defendant, as negotiated, to life with the possibility of parole, followed by five years of probation. The defendant will be eligible for parole after he has served a minimum of 30 years in prison. He was ordered no contact of any kind with the family of the victim and must complete evaluation and treatment for mental health and substance abuse. He was also barred from entering Cherokee County.

This case was investigated by the Woodstock Police Department and prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Rebecca Visockis, with assistance from Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Geoffrey Fogus, 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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