STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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COUNTY OF FORSYTH

2019 JUN 12 A 11: 43

IN THE GENERAL COURT OF JUSTICE SUPERIOR COURT DIVISION

V.

MERRITT WILLIAMS

THIS MATTER came on for hearing before the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission (Commission) on June 4, 2019 through June 7, 2019, pursuant to N.C.G.S. §§ 15A-1460 – 1475. After careful review of the evidence presented, the Commission hereby makes and enters the following findings of fact:

- On December 10, 1985, Blanche Bryson was found murdered in her home. 1.
- On August 4, 1987, Merritt Williams (Williams) was found guilty, after a jury trial, of First 2. Degree Murder. He received a life sentence to run consecutive to a life sentence he received in 86 CRS 018809 (Forsyth).
- 3. On June 29, 2015, Williams applied to the Commission claiming innocence in this case and the Commission began an inquiry pursuant to Article 92, Chapter 15A, of the General Statutes.
- Throughout the Commission's inquiry, Williams has fully cooperated with Commission staff 4. in accordance with N.C.G.S. § 15A-1467(g).
- 5. On June 4, 2019 through June 7, 2019, the Commission held a full evidentiary hearing in this matter pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 15A-1468.
- 6. During the hearing, the Commission considered testimonial and documentary evidence. The evidence included, among other things:
 - a. A 1604 page brief provided to the Commission by the Commission's Director prior to the hearing;

- Supplemental documentation, in the form of handouts, a PowerPoint presentation,
 and audio and video recordings provided prior to and during the hearing;
- c. Live testimony by Commission Associate Director Beth Tanner, Commission Grant Staff Attorney Catherine Matoian, Commission Staff Attorney Brian Ziegler, DNA expert Meghan Clement, trace expert Lindsey Admire, trace expert Dr. Max Houck, pathology expert Dr. Jerri McLemore, confessions and psychology expert Dr. Sharon Kelley, co-defendant Robbin Carmichael, and claimant Merritt Williams; and;
- d. Affidavits from Forsyth County Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer Christina
 Howell and defense attorney Charles Redden.
- After carefully considering this evidence, the Commission has concluded unanimously that there is sufficient evidence of factual innocence to merit judicial review.

WHEREFORE, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 15A-1468(c), and as Chair of the Commission, the undersigned refers this case to the Honorable L. Todd Burke, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge for Judicial District 21, and respectfully requests that the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court appoint a three-judge panel and issue commissions to its members to convene a special session of Superior Court of Forsyth County to hear evidence relevant to the Commission's recommendation.

This the 7th day of June, 2019.

The Honorable Thomas H. Lock

Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, District 11B

Alternate Chair, North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

The undersigned hereby certifies that the foregoing *Opinion* was served upon the following persons by depositing a copy of the same, postage pre-paid, in an official depository of the United States Postal Service, addressed as follows:

The Honorable L. Todd Burke Senior Resident Superior Court Judge, Judicial District 21 Forsyth County Courthouse PO Box 20099 Winston-Salem, NC 27120

The Honorable James O'Neill District Attorney, Prosecutorial District 31 200 N Main Street Winston-Salem, NC 27101

Ms. Julie Boyer Attorney at Law PO Box 21358 Winston-Salem, NC 27101

This the 12 day of June, 2019.

NORTH CAROLINA INNOCENCE INQUIRY COMMISSION

Lindsey Guice Smith

Executive Director

North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission

Post Office Box 2448

Raleigh, North Carolina 27602

Telephone: (919) 890-1580 Facsimile: (919) 890-1937