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Willie Clay Found Guilty of Murdering Cellmate
People v. Willie Clay: Kern County Superior Court Case BF183139A

(Bakersfield) – District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a significant murder verdict today relating to the death of 63-year-old Lawrence Tate. On July 16, 2025, a Kern County jury found Willie Clay guilty of first-degree murder and assault with force likely to cause great bodily injury. The jury also found true that Willie Clay inflicted great bodily injury on Lawrence Tate prior to the killing. Several circumstances in aggravation were also found true. This case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Jordan Houle.

On the late night of January 1, 2020, Willie Clay was incarcerated in North Kern State Prison in Delano, CA. There he shared a cell with Lawrence Tate, who was temporarily housed at North Kern State Prison. While confined in their cell for the evening, Clay brutally attacked Lawrence Tate. As a result of the attack, Tate sustained severe blunt force trauma to his head and neck. Correctional Officers responded to shouting coming from the area of their cell, where they found Clay covered in blood and Lawrence lying, bloodied and unresponsive, on his bunk.

Correctional Officers immediately retrieved Tate from the cell and rendered medical aid. Tate was transported by ambulance to a hospital where he died from his injuries in the early morning of January 2, 2020.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented: “Clay’s repeated violent behavior demands serious legal consequences. This conviction will ensure accountability for his actions while prioritizing public safety.”

Sentencing is scheduled for August 13, 2025, before the Honorable Kenneth C. Twisselman II in Department 9 of the Kern County Superior Court. Clay is currently serving 19 years in prison for a 2019 attempted murder out of Riverside County. The remainder of that sentence will run consecutive to his sentence on his current case in which he faces up to 35 years to life.

Willie Clay:

