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MEDIA ADVISORY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Approved by JAK
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Re: Murder Trial Conviction: People v. Derek Connell BF164057A

Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a significant conviction in a murder case today. On February 13, 2020, in a case prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Marcus Cuper, a Kern County jury found defendant Derek Connell guilty of one count of 1st degree murder and an additional count of 2nd degree murder. The jury also found true that multiple murders were committed, and that Connell committed the murders by use of a firearm.

Derek Connell lived with his mother, Kim Higginbotham, and his stepfather, Chris Higginbotham, on Lily Pad Court in Bakersfield in early 2016. On April 29th, 2016, Derek Connell sent a bizarre text message to his aunt, Sonia, in Scotland, indicating that Kim was deceased. Sonia tried to call Kim via Facetime video and Connell answered the call. During the Facetime call, Connell showed Sonia the bodies of Chris and Kim Higginbotham, who were lying on the floor and appeared to be deceased. Sonia called the Bakersfield Police Department from Scotland and officers arrived on scene within minutes. As officers were approaching the driveway to the Higginbotham's home, the garage door opened, and Connell started driving Kim's Acura out of the garage. Officers stopped Connell and ordered him out of the car. Connell had obvious blood stains and bleach stains on his pants. In the back of the Acura officers located two empty bottles of bleach and a bottle of Comet brand cleaner. Upon entering the home, officers found the bodies of Chris and Kim. Chris had suffered three gunshot wounds to his torso and multiple blunt force injuries to his face and head. Kim had suffered a single gunshot wound to her chest. There was an overwhelming odor of bleach in the home, and the floor was covered in blood, bleach, and Comet cleaner.

Officers located a .38-caliber revolver that was determined to be the murder weapon inside the home. Connell told detectives that he arrived home that evening and found his deceased parents on the floor. He claimed to have no idea what happened to them. Connell told the police several elaborate stories regarding his activities prior to finding his parents that night. Detectives suspected that Connell was lying in the first interview, and two days later, detectives conducted a second interview. In the

second interview, Connell told detectives that he had lied to them throughout the entire first interview. Connell said he actually came home and hung out with his parents and everything was fine. He stated that he went to sleep in his bedroom and when he awoke he found his parents deceased.

At trial, Connell testified to a third version of events, admitting that he lied to detective during *both* interviews and claimed that he had been sexually assaulted by his stepfather when he was a boy. Connell testified that Chris shot Kim during an argument, and that Connell fought with Chris before shooting him. Connell said he wanted Chris to suffer. Several witnesses then testified that Chris and Kim were compassionate and supportive parents to Connell, who was their only son.

Advised of the conviction, District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented that “The desperate attempt of a multiple-murderer to conceal his crimes by attacking the character of his victims was not enough to prevent the truth from being known in this case. Securing the attendance of a critical witness from a foreign country is a challenge, but one that we are willing to overcome to see justice is served.”

A jury convicted Connell of first-degree murder for the charge involving Christopher Higginbotham and second-degree murder for the charge involving Kim Higginbotham. Connell faces a maximum punishment of life without the possibility of parole. He is scheduled to be sentenced on March 12, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. in Dept. 6.

Derek Connell:

