



State Attorney

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Statement from Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office on Capital Punishment Decision in Howell Donaldson III Case

For the past 56 days since Howell Donaldson's arrest, my office has been evaluating the evidence in the Seminole Heights murders. We have spent countless hours reviewing the mountain of evidence gathered by our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners. We have investigated crime scenes, reviewed probable cause affidavits, studied surveillance videos, analyzed witness statements, and examined physical evidence. My team and I have met separately with each of the victims' families. We did this work in preparation for the most serious and sobering decision I make as the State Attorney for this community—whether to seek the death penalty.

After reviewing the evidence, analyzing the legal factors, speaking with the victims' families, and taking time for the quiet reflection that this tremendous responsibility demands, I have determined that, for the murders of Benjamin Mitchell, Monica Hoffa, Anthony Naiboa, and Ronald Felton, my office will seek the sentence of death against Howell Donaldson III. The law is clear: we reserve the death penalty for the most aggravated and least mitigated capital offenses. This case, in which the defendant murdered four innocent victims in a cold, calculated, and premeditated manner, qualifies. A prosecutor's pursuit of justice should be tempered by mercy. But some crimes are so unconscionable, so hard to fathom, that I must leave mercy to a higher power, and focus instead on achieving justice for the victims and their families.

I understand that some in our community will agree with my decision; some will not. But deciding whether to seek death is not about what's popular or politically convenient. It requires far more than that. My obligation is to evaluate all the evidence to determine whether there is a legal basis for the death penalty and to consider the wishes of the victims' families for how we best achieve justice for their loved ones. And that is exactly what we did.

I want to thank the victims' families. During the worst moments of their lives, they took the time to meet with me, our homicide prosecutors, and our counselors. To participate in the judicial process, they have fought through their anger and their tears. And we are grateful for their trust.

A case like this touches thousands of lives. To all the law enforcement officers and investigators who worked so hard on this case: thank you. Your outstanding effort makes justice possible for all of us. To the community members who provided valuable information leading to the defendant's arrest, thank you. Your cooperation inspires us to look out for each other. And to my team of prosecutors and staff: because of your diligence and excellence, this community is safer and stronger each and every day.

To everyone watching, please keep the victims and their families in your thoughts and prayers. This prosecution cannot bring back Benjamin, Monica, Anthony, or Ronald. But we can seek justice for their deaths. And we will.