



State Attorney

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State Attorney Andrew Warren's Statement on Howell Emanuel Donaldson III and the Seminole Heights Killings

November 30, 2017

On Tuesday, Howell Emanuel Donaldson III was arrested on four counts of first degree murder. First, let me commend Chief Dugan and all the men and women of the Tampa Police Department along with all of the law enforcement agencies who worked so hard to investigate the Seminole Heights killings. We also thank our steadfast community members and the individuals who embraced their civic duty by providing information to law enforcement to help identify the perpetrator. The community's cooperation saved lives.

Our office has been working with law enforcement since the first killing. Now that Mr. Donaldson has been arrested, the integrity of this case rests with my office.

Going forward, this office has two goals. First and foremost, to prosecute this case to the fullest extent of the law in order to hold the defendant accountable and seek justice for his crimes. And second, to keep the public informed by providing as much information as we are allowed to. However, while the prosecution is pending, I won't be able to answer many of your questions – not because we don't know the answers, but because my office has the responsibility to protect the integrity of this case to ensure that justice is done. So, although I am not able to discuss specific facts, details, and strategies of a pending case, I promise to be as transparent as possible during the process.

We have some of the best homicide prosecutors in the State of Florida. I, along with them, will be working every detail of this case. Since the defendant's arrest, we have been diligently evaluating the evidence and continuing the investigation as we prepare to bring charges. We intend to charge the defendant with four counts of first

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degree murder, which requires bringing the case before the grand jury to obtain an indictment.

This morning the Defendant had his initial appearance. For the community's safety, we are seeking that the defendant be held in jail without bond until the trial is over. The defendant has a right to a hearing before being detained pretrial, and the Judge set that hearing for next Tuesday. These are the initial steps in a legal process that takes time — from arrest to indictment to trial to conviction to sentencing. I have great confidence in our criminal justice system, and we value the community's trust in and patience with the process as we work to achieve justice for the victims, their families, and our entire community.

I'm as shocked and angry as the entire community, and my heart goes out to the families of the four victims. As I said, we will prosecute this case to the fullest extent of the law. The death penalty is reserved for the worst of the worst offenders in our society. Generally speaking, serial killers qualify. But it is my duty to follow the law. When I was sworn in as State Attorney, I put my hand on the bible and took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the laws of Florida. That oath is sacred. And so, consistent with my duties, I will evaluate all the aggravating and mitigating evidence to determine whether there is a legal basis for capital punishment under the U.S. Supreme Court and Florida law. If the case satisfies the legal requirements, and it is consistent with what the victims' families want, then we will seek the death penalty. When I took office, I established a process to diligently and thoroughly evaluate all the available evidence before making a decision about whether to seek death. This case, like every other capital case this office has handled over the past eleven months, will go through that process to make sure that I am faithfully executing my duty to follow the law.

To the victims' families, to the residents of Seminole Heights, to the business owners and employees working in Seminole Heights, to our entire community: I want to say again plainly and clearly: we will prosecute this case to the fullest extent of the law. As we move from the investigation to the prosecution phase, let us be mindful of the victims' families, respect their privacy and mourning, and keep them in our thoughts and prayers.