

**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Guilty Verdict for Canton Resident Charged with Family Violence - Strangulation**  
**State vs. Ricky Bernard Harris**

**July 2, 2021** – District Attorney Shannon Wallace announces that a Cherokee County jury convicted Ricky Bernard Harris, 36, on all counts in a case of family violence that involved his wife and stepchildren. Charges included aggravated assault - family violence, battery - family violence (2 counts), and cruelty to children in the third degree (4 counts).

The incident occurred on the evening of April 30, 2020. While his wife was cooking dinner, Harris became aggressive and began repeatedly poking her in the face. A physical altercation ensued and the children attempted to intervene. He then proceeded to attack his 17-year-old stepdaughter, pushing her down and strangling her by placing both hands on her neck. When his 14-year-old stepson attempted to intervene, Harris punched him in the eye. When he again attempted to go after his 17-year-old stepdaughter, his wife tried to stop him and he punched her repeatedly in the head.

Three other children in the home witnessed the incident and corroborated the story. The children involved ranged in age from 8 to 17.

Canton Police investigated the incident after receiving a 911 call placed by one of the children. The responding officer had recently attended specialized training on strangulation crimes offered by the Cherokee County Domestic Violence Task Force in November 2019. The officer utilized what he had learned at that training to assess the strangulation allegation.

“This was not the first time the defendant lost control with his family, but it was the worst,” said Assistant District Attorney Rachel Ashe, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. “On this occasion, his anger and need to control were not only focused on his wife, but also his stepchildren, who were placed in a horrible position of having to act as deflectors and defenders of their mother, their siblings, and themselves.”

Harris is a recidivist offender with prior family violence convictions, including a conviction in Cherokee County involving his wife and a conviction in Fulton County involving a prior girlfriend who testified during this trial.

During the trial, the State called 11 witnesses to the stand, including the children and Harris’ wife. After deliberating for about five hours, the jury issued its guilty verdict on Friday, June 23.

Judge Tony Baker sentenced the defendant on June 30, to 30 years, with 15 years to serve in prison. Since Harris is a recidivist, he must serve all 15 years. When he is released from prison, he must adhere to conditions of probation including no contact with the victim or the victims’ family.

“Domestic violence is a crime that often occurs behind closed doors, victimizing both adults and children. Thankfully, in this case, a child had the courage to call 911, which effectively ended the cycle of violence,” said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. “Through this guilty verdict and sentence, our hope is that this family is strengthened and able to rise above the trauma they have had to endure.”

### **Domestic Violence and Strangulation**

Domestic violence typically follows a pattern, with tension building, followed by a major act of violence, a calm period, and then cycling back to tension building. This cycle of violence can continue over years or even decades. As time passes, the violent episodes often get more serious and may lead to a lethal act.

Strangulation is one of the most lethal forms of domestic violence even though injuries may appear to be mild or victims may have no visible marks. According to the Training Institute on Strangulation Prevention, strangulation is the ultimate form of power and control in which the batterer asserts control over the victim’s next breath. Odds for homicide increase substantially (750%) for victims who have been previously strangled.

If you or someone you know is impacted by domestic violence and/or strangulation, please contact the Cherokee Family Violence Center, CFVC.org, 770-479-1703 (24/7 crisis hotline). In case of an emergency, call 911.

*The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.*

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