

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cherokee County jury convicts Canton man of aggravated cruelty to animals
State vs. Randall Keith Lathem

February 15, 2022 – District Attorney Shannon Wallace announces that on December 10, 2021, a Cherokee County jury found Randall Keith Lathem, 55, of Canton guilty of one count of aggravated cruelty to animals. On January 24, 2022, Senior Judge Frank C. Mills III sentenced Lathem to 5 years, with the first 2 years to serve in confinement and the balance on probation.

Charges relate to a 2017 discovery of a deceased female dog in a home where Lathem had been living. The property belonged to a family member who asked Lathem to move out so the house could be sold. Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies accompanied Lathem's brother to the home to execute a writ of possession, which had been served on November 13, 2017. The family believed Lathem was still residing in the home with his dog.

When deputies entered the home, they found a small black and brown dog lying inside a room, dead, surrounded by multiple piles of feces. The dog had no access to food or water and was trapped inside the empty house.

At some point, Lathem had moved out of the home without telling anyone, abandoning his 2.5-year-old pet inside the residence.

The dog was later taken to the University of Georgia Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories for a necropsy, which determined she likely died of starvation due to her body condition and lack of subcutaneous and visceral fat stores.

During the one-day jury trial, Assistant District Attorney Rachel Clark, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the state, presented evidence that the deceased dog was Lathem's pet and sole responsibility.

"This defendant blamed everyone but himself for his actions. Initially, he blamed his brother. Later, he claimed he gave the dog to someone he met in a grocery store," said ADA Clark. "The fact is he refuses to accept responsibility and simply makes excuses for putting his own pet in a situation where she suffered untold pain until she died, alone and uncared for."

At the conclusion of the January 24 hearing, Judge Mills sentenced the defendant to 5 years with 2 years to serve in confinement. While on probation, Lathem will be subject to general conditions of probation, including no possession of firearms, alcohol, or illegal substances. He must also complete an evaluation for emotional, mental health and substance abuse and seek treatment. He must avoid contact with his brother, may not possess a pet of any type, and must pay restitution and attorney fees.

“This defendant has never admitted his guilt, so we have no way to determine how long this little dog suffered before she died, hungry, thirsty, and probably very scared,” said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. “Pets are not objects to be left behind and forgotten. They rely on human companions to care for them and provide the basic necessities of life.”

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and Marshal’s Office. The prosecution was handled by ADA Rachel Clark of the Cherokee County District Attorney’s Office.

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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