

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Cherokee County jury finds former Atlanta police officer guilty of rape and violation of oath,
Sentenced to 50 years in prison followed by life on probation
State vs. Lionel Joseph Dely**

December 5, 2022 – District Attorney Shannon Wallace announces that on October 21, 2022, a Cherokee County jury found former Atlanta Police Officer Lionel Joseph Dely, 33, of Marietta, guilty of rape and violation of oath by a public officer. During the November 30th sentencing hearing, Dely was sentenced to 50 years in prison followed by life on probation.

Charges stem from a rape reported in February 2022 by a woman living in the Acworth area of Cherokee County. The woman, who operates a massage business out of her home, told Cherokee Sheriff's Office deputies that on January 31, 2022, a new client arrived for a scheduled appointment. Approximately halfway through the massage, Dely showed her his law enforcement badge and told her he was an Atlanta police officer conducting an investigation. He then sexually assaulted her against her will.

Because Dely intimidated and threatened the victim using his badge, she feared repercussions. Three days later, a friend convinced her to call 911 to report the crime. After an investigation that included a sexual assault exam, forensic digital evidence, and DNA testing, Dely was arrested on February 11.

During the prosecution of this case, the Cherokee Sheriff's Office and the Cherokee County District Attorney's Office worked collaboratively and located three other victims that Dely had sexually assaulted in locations outside of Cherokee County. Due to these crimes occurring in other jurisdictions, Cherokee County could not bring criminal charges for those offenses; however, the three other victims were permitted to testify at trial about their own sexual assaults as supporting evidence against Dely.

"The defendant's conduct in this case was predatory, calculated, and deliberate. He used his law enforcement badge, a symbol of protection and safety, to exploit and violate multiple women undetected," said Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper, Special Victims Unit, Office of the District Attorney. "This serial rapist believed he was above the law and was only stopped when one courageous Cherokee County woman came forward."

During the five-day trial, 13 witnesses testified for the State, including the victim and three similar victims who described incidents that paralleled the rape reported in Cherokee County. The jury deliberated just

over an hour before coming to its unanimous decision, convicting the defendant on both the rape and violation of oath charges.

At the sentencing hearing, two victims provided victim impact statements.

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am that I am free and Lionel Dely is not,” said one woman who suffered at the hands of Dely. She described the fear, anxiety, flashbacks, and depression she has experienced, then added that she reported her rape and testified so that Dely could never hurt another woman again.

A similar victim who lives outside Cherokee County said, “I am standing here, not a helpless victim, but a warrior who faced evil, stood up, and said enough is enough. I stand here today because I deserve justice.”

Prior to sentencing, Superior Court Judge Tony Baker addressed Dely, telling him he had “a very cold heart” and “treated these women as if they were nothing.”

“Your badge is supposed to be used to serve and protect,” said Judge Baker, “but you used it to abuse and prey on these women.”

Judge Baker sentenced Dely to 45 years in prison for the rape count, followed by lifetime probation with sex offender conditions, \$1,100 in restitution, no contact with any of the victims, and 4th amendment waiver. For violation of oath of office, he was sentenced to 5 additional years to run consecutively, for a total of 50 years to serve in prison.

“Law enforcement officers are subject to the same laws as all members of our society and, in fact, held to a higher standard. When an officer violates his oath and abuses the trust placed in him, he must be held responsible. Lionel Dely abused this trust. He viciously violated these women, misused his badge, and has shown no remorse for his actions,” said District Attorney Shannon Wallace. “To the victims in this case, please know that we hear you in Cherokee County. You are not forgotten. You are not invisible. We hope that through this outcome you can regain the trust in law enforcement that this defendant stole and have faith in our judicial process.”

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office and prosecuted by Deputy Chief Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper and Assistant District Attorney Rachel Hines, of the Special Victims Unit, Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit.

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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