

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



SUSAN K. TREADAWAY
Acting District Attorney

Cherokee County Justice Center
90 North Street, Suite 390
Canton, GA 30114

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Cyndi Crossland
Public Information Officer
cbcrossland@cherokeega.com
770-479-1488

Gang Member Sentenced to 60 Years Following Armed Robbery Conviction
State vs. Ajani Malik Harris

February 16, 2023 – Acting District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that a Cherokee County jury convicted Ajani Malik Harris, 22, of violating the Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act, armed robbery, aggravated assault, and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

On December 20, 2022, Judge David Cannon, Jr., sentenced Harris to a total of 60 years, with the first 30 years to serve in prison and the remainder on probation. Special conditions include banishment from Cherokee County and no contact with any member or associate of a criminal street gang.

Charges stem from an armed robbery involving four co-defendants and two victims. The incident occurred on July 23, 2019, after Rachel Marek invited a man she had recently met to an apartment in the Acworth area of Cherokee County. When the man arrived, Ajani Harris (aka Kaejoo) was waiting in the parking lot with a rifle in a guitar case.

Marek admitted the victim and another man into the apartment. Within moments of their arrival, Harris came into the apartment and pointed the rifle at the two men while Jayden Hickman (aka Huncho) pointed a handgun. Dorian McElheney (aka Goku) assisted in robbing the victims, taking a wallet, cell phone, headphones, and shoes.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office investigated the case and arrested Harris, of Powder Springs, and his three co-defendants: Marek of Kennesaw, Hickman of Marietta, and McElheney of Kennesaw.

With the assistance of Kennesaw Police Department, which was familiar with Harris, Hickman, and McElheney, as well as an analysis of social media, electronic devices, and jail communications, investigators determined that all four co-defendants were associates of criminal street gangs, specifically Yarborough Park Crips and Young Slime Life (YSL). Other evidence in the case showed that the criminal acts were committed in furtherance of gang activity.

In January 2020, while Harris was incarcerated in the Adult Detention Center, the District Attorney's Office uncovered jail communications involving a phone call between Harris and another party. During that phone call, Harris said he needed assistance with his case and mentioned a letter with instructions regarding the armed robbery victims. Based on information disclosed in that phone conversation, CSO executed a search warrant at a home and located a letter in which Harris provided personal details of the armed robbery victims, along with a plan to threaten, bribe, intimidate, and prevent the victims from testifying against him. CSO then charged Harris with conspiracy to commit influencing a witness and violation of Street Gang Terrorism and Prevention Act.

“Ajani Harris not only failed to take responsibility for his actions, but also worked to circumvent the system by using his status in the gang to intimidate and threaten the victims in this case. If not for the actions of law

enforcement, in collaboration with members of the District Attorney's Office, this could have resulted in further harm to the victims," said Assistant District Attorney Megan S. Hertel, who prosecuted the case on behalf of the State. "This jury, through its verdict, and this Court, through its sentence, have shown our community that we will not be intimidated by criminal street gangs in Cherokee County."

Harris' three co-defendants pled guilty prior to trial. McElheney, 21, and Hickman, 22, were sentenced to 20 years with 10 years to serve in prison, and Marek, 22, was sentenced to 20 years with 5 years to serve in prison.

Following the jury verdict for the armed robbery case, Harris entered a non-negotiated guilty plea to conspiracy to commit influencing a witness and the other gang charges incurred in the related case. Judge Cannon sentenced him to 20 years for these charges, to run concurrent with the other case.

"Our state leaders have enacted and supported the Street Gang Terrorism Prevention Act in response to the clear and present danger that these defendants and others pose to the citizens of Georgia. It is our paramount duty as prosecutors to utilize the tools provided to us under Georgia law to vigorously pursue those who seek to terrorize our community through these types of crimes," said Acting District Attorney Susan Treadaway. "The jury's verdict in this case represents another step towards fulfilling our mission to eradicate criminal street gang activity in our state. The District Attorney's Office will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners in this fight to ensure that justice is served."

This case was investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff's Office and prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Megan S. Hertel and Assistant District Attorney Rachel S. Tomlinson, 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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