



DOUGLAS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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District Attorney Suzanne Valdez's Statement on *State of Kansas v. Rontarus Washington*

Lawrence, Kan. – On January 12, 2015, the State charged Rontarus Washington with Murder in the First Degree and Aggravated Burglary in connection with the death of 19-year-old Justina Altamirano Mosso.

After Mr. Washington waived his Constitutional and Statutory Speedy Trial protections through his defense counsel, Mr. Washington remained in the Douglas County Correctional Facility awaiting trial.

In September 2019, after delays attributable to many factors, Mr. Washington was tried by a jury for these two alleged crimes. After a four-week trial, the jury was unable to reach a verdict. A mistrial was declared, and the matter was scheduled to be retried. Approximately ten months later, in July 2020, Washington was released on bond from State's custody.

Mr. Washington was represented at trial by two capable defense attorneys, Angela Keck and Adam Hall. Ms. Keck and Mr. Hall remain as Mr. Washington's counsel. The State is represented by Deputy District Attorney David Melton and Senior Assistant District Attorney Alice Walker. Like Ms. Keck and Mr. Hall, both prosecutors are experienced and capable. Mr. Melton and Ms. Walker did not represent the State during the first trial.

During my campaign for Douglas County District Attorney during the 2020 election cycle, I expressed that "a prosecutor is ethically bound to bring swift justice to all those in the criminal justice system." This public statement is as accurate now as it was when I made it during my campaign. At that time, I spoke to the lengthy time it took to bring Mr. Washington to trial.

Throughout my campaign, I pledged to seek justice for victims and survivors. Ms. Mosso's life was taken, and she deserves justice. Ms. Mosso's family, and the community, deserve justice.

To be clear, to the extent that I ever took a position on *State v. Washington* as a candidate for District Attorney, my statements were grounded in my belief that Mr. Washington did not receive "swift" procedural justice in the first instance, when Charles Branson was District Attorney.

I could not, nor have I ever, commented on the merits of the *State v. Washington* case. Importantly, I have never promised to dismiss the case against Mr. Washington.



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This office remains committed to pursuing equal and equitable justice for all affected parties. I am confident that we are proceeding in that manner.

Since I took office on January 11, 2021, the *State v. Washington* case has been before the District Court on several motions. The case is currently set for a second jury trial in September 2021 if COVID restrictions are lifted and jury trials are allowed to go forward.

Mr. Washington is presumed innocent unless and until he is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

To the extent the Douglas County District Attorney's Office can ensure "swift" justice for Mr. Washington, we are committed to doing so, and have done so. The two prosecutors currently assigned to *State v. Washington* have my full confidence to represent the State in its promise to pursue the administration of justice.

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