PRESS RELEASE

Today, The Honorable Superior Court Judge Brian Collins, ruled in favor of Montoyae Dontae Sharpe and his attorneys, ordering that Mr. Sharpe’s case be returned to Superior Court for a new trial. On August, 22, 2019 at today’s evidentiary hearing, Charlene Johnson Frazier testified that at age 14, she signed a statement implicating Mr. Sharpe after she talked with Detectives Ricky Best and Carolyn Melvin. Charlene testified that she lied when she testified at the original trial against Dontae Sharpe. She stated that she never witnessed Dontae shoot George Radcliffe. She also said that she would testify that her original testimony was a lie if she were called in a new trial. Ms. Frazier received a great deal of attention while she was a State’s witness in the case, going to the District Attorney’s Office on a regular basis. During the fifteen months between the time she gave her original statement and the trial, Ms. Johnson never informed anyone that what she had said was false. Charlene testified that after the trial she no longer received the same attention and had contact with Sharpe’s family.

Defense witness, Joe Cheshire, a leading North Carolina Indigent Defense Attorney, testified that a medical examiner’s opinion had particular power with a jury. Mr. Cheshire believes that had the jury heard Dr. Gilliland give her opinion that Charlene Johnson’s testimony was medically and scientifically impossible, then more than likely than not it would have been a different result.

The Defense argued that the newly discovered evidence is dispositive and that the Court should grant the relief requested in the Motion for Appropriate Relief. The State argued that the review of evidence was inconclusive, and that the decision should be left in the hands of the Court.

On February 11, 1994, Mr. George Radcliffe was found dead in the front seat of his pick-up truck. On April 7, 1994, Ms. Charlene Johnson, a then 14-year old girl, made a statement to officers with the Greenville Police Department that she witnessed Dontae Sharpe in an argument with a white male in a dispute over a cocaine sale, and that Dontae Sharpe pulled out a gun and shot the man at the intersection of 6th and Shepherd Streets. She stated that Dontae Sharpe and his friend, Mark Joyner, then picked the man up from the street and put him in the truck, moved the truck, and drove it into a field through the intersection. Another witness, Beatrice Stokes, came forward later also stating that she saw Dontae Sharpe talking to the man, but did not witness the shooting.

On April 7, 1994, the Greenville Police Department arrested Dontae Sharpe for the murder of George Radcliffe. On July 27, 1995 a jury found Dontae Sharpe guilty of first degree murder. The trial court, Honorable J. Richard Parker, Superior Court Judge, sentenced Dontae Sharpe to life in prison.

Dontae Sharpe appealed that decision and on July 31, 1996, the North Carolina Supreme Court concluded that Dontae Sharpe received a fair trial, free of prejudicial error. On December 11, 1997 an evidentiary hearing was held on the first Motion for Appropriate Relief filed February 14, 1997. Around September of 1995, Ms. Johnson had recanted her original trial testimony, saying that she had never witnessed Dontae Sharpe shoot George Radcliffe. On December 11, 1997 at the evidentiary hearing, the court had the opportunity to consider Ms. Johnson’s recantation of her original testimony. The Court determined that, despite Ms. Johnson having been beaten up by associates of Dontae Sharpe immediately after giving her original statement and fearing for her life, had maintained that same statement for over a year and testified consistently at the trial. After having developed a friendship with the Sharpe family and his associates after the trial, the court found that Ms. Johnson was more than likely telling the truth when she gave her original statement and did not believe her recantation. Over the years, there have been additional filings in both federal and state courts, seeking review of Mr. Sharpe’s conviction and alleging that there was new evidence or testimony that others might have committed the crime, and each time the courts have concluded that the testimony is not believable or credible and has confirmed the conviction of Mr. Sharpe.

The only two eyewitnesses in this case were Charlene Johnson, who denies that she saw anything and only walked up on the crime scene later after the scene had been cleared, and Beatrice Stokes, who denies that she witnessed Dontae Sharpe shoot Radcliffe. There is no forensic evidence tying Sharpe to the murder. The only remaining evidence is that of Dr. Mary Gilliland, the medical examiner for the Brody School of Medicine and Vidant who gave the report on the autopsy findings at the original trial, who has testified that it is medically and scientifically impossible for the crime to have occurred the way the eyewitnesses have described. Charlene Johnson and Beatrice Stokes have both stated that Dontae Sharpe was face to face with Radcliffe when he got into an argument with him outside of his truck. Dr. Gilliland has stated that, given the path of the bullet in Mr. Radcliffe’s body from side to side, a face to face shooting could not have been what happened.

It would be impossible for the State to prove the case against Dontae Sharpe at this time with no eyewitness or forensic evidence to prove he committed the murder beyond a reasonable doubt. Therefore, the State takes a dismissal and Dontae Sharpe has been released from prison after serving 25 years behind bars.

The Pitt County District Attorney’s office respects the ruling of Judge Collins. Our mission is to seek fairness, truth and justice for ALL people and work towards a better system.