



From: Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office and  
Cleveland Division of Police

Sgt. Jennifer Ciaccia, Public Information Officer  
216-623-5033

Ryan Miday, Director of Communications  
216-698-3532

---

**For Immediate Release:  
Tuesday, January 15, 2018**

## **Godmother and Her Husband Indicted for Murder of Four-Year-Old Eliazar Ruiz**

CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley and Cleveland Police Department Chief Calvin Williams announced that a Cuyahoga County Grand Jury has indicted Joanne Vega, 31, and Romaine Tolbert, 36, for the murder of four-year-old Eliazar Ruiz. Vega was the victim's godmother and Tolbert is her husband.

"Diligent police work by the Cleveland Police Department led to this indictment," said Prosecutor O'Malley. "There is nothing worse than the murder of a child. We will seek justice for Eliazar."

Vega and Tolbert have both been charged with Murder, Permitting Child Abuse, Felonious Assault, Endangering Children, Involuntary Manslaughter, Gross Abuse of A Corpse, Tampering With Evidence, and Kidnapping.

Preparing to serve a term of incarceration, the victim's mother, 28, dropped him off at Vega's house in March 2015. The victim was last seen by family members in July 2016. The victim was reported missing in June 2017.

On September 20th, 2017, the Cleveland Police Department (CPD) and Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office (CCMEO) responded to a vacant house located at 12902 Longmead Ave., Cleveland, where human remains were found in a plastic bag in the backyard. An autopsy revealed that the remains belonged to a small child.

The 15-month investigation, led by CPD's Homicide Unit, revealed the remains belonged to Eliazar Ruiz, and identified Joanne Vega and Romaine Tolbert as responsible for the murder.