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Cleveland Man Convicted of Murder for Driving Over Woman During Carjacking in Church Parking Lot

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CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that after a nine-day trial, the Jury found Michael Preston, 23, guilty for the murder of Lesley DeJesus, 33, in Cleveland on November 15, 2018.

“This was a tragic loss of life during a time the victim and her family were preparing for a celebration,” said Prosecutor O'Malley. “There was a mountain of DNA evidence that illustrated he was responsible for this crime, so his conviction comes as no surprise.”

The jury found Preston guilty of the following charges:

- Murder
- Reckless Homicide
- Felonious Assault
- 2 counts of Aggravated Robbery

On November 15, 2018, the victim and her husband, Jesus Cruz-Maldonado, 38, took their children to a church on Archwood Ave., near Pearl Rd., to prepare for their daughter's Quinceañera that was planned at the venue later that weekend. When the daughter noticed Preston and another male inside her parents' vehicle, both parents ran outside to the parking lot and a struggle ensued. Mr. Cruz-Maldonado pulled one of the males from the passenger seat and that suspect fled the scene.

When he and his wife tried to prevent Preston from stealing their van, Preston started the ignition and put the vehicle in reverse, dragging both victims through the parking lot before they fell to the ground. Preston then put the vehicle in drive and accelerated over the victim's body. He drove down the street, exited the vehicle and ran away.

Cleveland Police responded to the scene immediately. The victim was pronounced deceased on scene and her husband, who suffered injuries, was later treated at a hospital.

The investigation conducted by Cleveland Police and the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office linked Preston to the crime scene. His DNA was found on the gearshift, steering wheel, and driver's side door handle of the victim's car. DNA found on a lighter, brick, screwdriver, and pry tool on scene also matched to Preston.

Prosecutors called 12 witnesses to testify in trial. Jury selection began January 6th. Closing arguments were given January 16th. The jury deliberated for two days before reaching their verdict.

Sentencing is scheduled for February 10th at 9am. Preston faces up to Life in Prison.

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