

Convicted rapist indicted in Virginia murder case that sent another man to prison for 18 years

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CULPEPER, Va. – A convicted serial rapist has been indicted in a 1982 rape and slaying that another man spent 18 years in prison for, at one point coming within days of his execution.

A Culpeper County grand jury Monday indicted Kenneth Maurice Tinsley on charges of murder, rape and sodomy in the death of Rebecca Lynn Williams. The 19-year-old mother was found stabbed to death outside her Culpeper apartment.

Tinsley, 61, is serving a life term in a Virginia prison for a 1984 rape in Albemarle County and has two rape convictions in Chicago.

Earl Washington Jr. spent more than a decade on death row after being convicted of Williams' slaying and came within nine days of execution in 1985.

After DNA testing in 1993 cast doubt on Washington's guilt, then-Gov. L. Douglas Wilder commuted his sentence to life in prison. More sophisticated DNA tests conducted in 2000 prompted then-Gov. Jim Gilmore to pardon Washington.

In May, Washington was awarded \$2.25 million by a federal court jury that ruled that the mildly retarded man falsely confessed after he was fed details of the crime by a state police investigator.

Tinsley's name emerged only during Washington's civil lawsuit. Washington's attorneys also learned that the Virginia state lab had botched earlier DNA tests.

Tinsley's DNA was identified six years ago as matching semen found on the victim. Special Prosecutor Richard E. Moore declined to say why it took six years to obtain an indictment, except to say the latest conclusion was "based in large part on test results not available to any previous prosecutors in this case."

Tinsley is scheduled to appear in Culpeper Circuit Court on Sept. 6. Tinsley was to have a lawyer appointed at that time. Prosecutors have not announced whether they will seek the death penalty.

Curtis Wilmore, the state police investigator cited in Washington's false confession, died in 1994. An attorney for his estate has asked the court to vacate the jury's verdict.

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