



J. HANLEY

WINNEBAGO COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

PRESS RELEASE
January 31, 2025
State's Attorney J. Hanley

Winnebago County State's Attorney J. Hanley announces that on January 30, 2025, **Eric Jackson (DOB: 4/16/83)** was sentenced to natural life in the Illinois Department of Corrections for the death of Keandra Austin and her three children on September 17, 2016. The defendant was found guilty of the four counts of murder on June 23, 2016 following a jury trial before the Honorable Judge Brendan Maher.

On September 17, 2016, around 5:00am, the Rockford Fire Department responded to a residential structure fire in the 2800 Block of Garfield Drive. Upon arrival, Firefighters observed the residence to be fully engulfed in fire with neighboring residences also suffering damage. After the fire was extinguished, firefighters located the body of a child in a bedroom of the residence and notified the Rockford Police Department. The bodies of Keandra Austin and her 3 children were located inside the residence. Autopsies were completed and it was determined that Keandra had died of multiple penetrating chest injuries prior to the fire and that her children had died during the fire from asphyxia. During the course of the investigation, Detectives learned that Keandra Austin was having trouble with a neighbor, Eric Jackson, and his family that resided down the street. Witnesses were interviewed including multiple family members of the defendant as well as the defendant himself. The Defendant initially advised he was home at the time of the fire, however the investigation revealed that not to be accurate. A family member of the Defendant advised detectives they had seen Jackson early that morning and he had a strong odor of gasoline and was acting nervously. Detectives also learned that Jackson had made statements to multiple individuals that he and another person had set fire to the residence.

First Degree Murder is a Class M Felony ordinarily punishable by 20-60 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections followed by a term of mandatory supervised released of three years. However, because the defendant in this case was convicted of murdering two or more individuals, he was to be sentenced to a term of natural life imprisonment with no term of parole.



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The Rockford Police Department and Rockford Fire Arson Investigators conducted the investigation in this case. Assistant State's Attorney Kirstin Krivanec and First Assistant Ken LaRue handled the prosecution.

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