

Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Serial Rapist Pleads Guilty to Two Cold Case Sexual Assaults; Sentenced to an Additional 20 Years in Prison

CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that Ronald Wheeler, 48, pleaded guilty to raping two women in Cleveland in December 2006 and March 2007. Wheeler was sentenced immediately afterward to 20 years in prison.

"This serial rapist, who has been convicted of raping six victims, will now rightfully die behind bars," said Prosecutor O'Malley. "Although delayed, justice has been served for these victims."

On December 18, 2006, Wheeler approached the victim, 18, as she was walking near East 105th Street and Quincy Avenue in Cleveland. He pulled out a gun, grabbed the victim, and forced the victim to climb through an open window of a nearby empty building. He threatened to kill her and sexually assaulted her multiple times at gunpoint before fleeing the scene. The victim was transported to a nearby hospital where a sexual assault kit was collected.

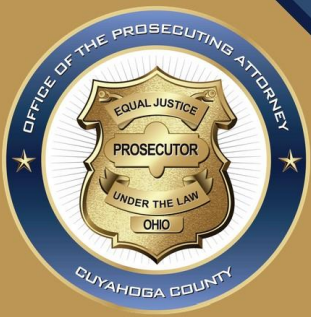
On March 19, 2007, Wheeler approached the victim, 23, who was holding her 5-month-old infant while at a bus stop near Woodhill Road and Woodland Avenue in Cleveland. He pulled out a gun, threatened to kill the victim and her baby, and forced her to a vacant area by nearby train tracks. He sexually assaulted her multiple times, several times while holding the victim's child, and continued to threaten their lives before stealing her money and fleeing the scene. The victim was transported to a nearby hospital where a sexual assault kit was collected.

In 2013, the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (CCPO) assembled the Sexual Assault Kit Task Force (SAKTF) to address investigative leads that resulted from the testing of previously unsubmitted rape kits primarily between 1993 to 2011. Both victims' rape kits were tested by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) as part of the initiative. The offender's DNA from both victims' rape kits produced matches to Wheeler, whose DNA was in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) – the FBI's national DNA database – for prior crimes he committed.

He pleaded guilty to the following charges:

- **Two counts of Rape**
- **One count of Kidnapping**

Wheeler, who is already serving a 48-year prison term for four other stranger rapes, was sentenced to 20 additional years in prison. He will not be eligible for release until August 2075.



Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office

Michael C. O'Malley

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CCPO SAKTF History

Since its inception, the Task Force has completed 7,026 investigations that have resulted in 830 defendants indicted, the highest number of any SAKTF in the country. The number of indictments include 930 victims as several defendants are convicted or alleged serial offenders. Of those cases, the Task Force has secured a 93.3% conviction rate.

In October 2020, the CCPO SAKTF was awarded a \$1,000,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, which helped launch the office's G.O.L.D. Unit (Genetic Operations Linking DNA). The GOLD Unit's work includes expanding SAKTF investigations to include kits submitted from 2012 to 2019, genealogical testing of cold case sexual assaults and cold case sexually-motivated homicides, and continuing the Lawfully Owed DNA project.

The SAKTF is led by the CCPO and includes the Cleveland Police Department, Ohio BCI, Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department, Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office, Case Western Reserve University, and the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.