OFFICIAL STATEMENT | August 3, 2023

AG Fitch Files Charges in January 24 Officer-Involved Shooting in Rankin County

(Jackson, Mississippi) Attorney General Lynn Fitch announced today that her office filed charges in Rankin County Circuit Court against six officers involved in a shooting on January 24, 2023, in Braxton, Mississippi. The five former officers of the Rankin County Sheriff's Office and one former Richland Police Department Investigator were charged with Aggravated Assault, Home Invasion, Obstruction of Justice/Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree, and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.

"Without a relationship of trust between law enforcement officers and those they swear to serve and protect, our fight for justice and against crime is doomed to fail," **said Attorney General Lynn Fitch.** "This brutal attack caused more than physical harm to these two individual victims; it severed that vital trust with the people. This abuse of power will not be tolerated. The Attorney General's Office is committed to delivering justice for these victims and for all Mississippians."

The Attorney General's Office has worked closely with the U.S. Attorney's Office on this matter. Mississippi Deputy Attorney General Mary Helen Wall was deputized as a Special Assistant U.S. Attorney for the federal case and is leading the prosecution of the state case, which was investigated by the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation.

"The egregious conduct of these individuals is a dark stain on law enforcement and erodes the public's trust in a profession that does so many great things each and every day," **said Public Safety Commissioner Sean Tindell.** "I am grateful for the hard work of our federal counterparts, which is reflected in today's outcome. I am also extremely confident in the process by which these cases are now investigated and prosecuted by the State of Mississippi. The work of the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation and the Attorney General's Office will help build public confidence that bad actors such as these will be held accountable at the state level, as well."

The state charges as are follows:

- Former Rankin County Sheriff Deputy **Hunter Elward** was charged with Aggravated Assault, Home Invasion, and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.
- Former Rankin County Sheriff Narcotics Investigator **Christian Dedmon** was charged with Home Invasion and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.
- Former Rankin County Sheriff Chief Investigator **Brett McAlpin** was charged with Obstruction of Justice/Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.
- Former Rankin County Sheriff Lieutenant **Jeffrey Middleton** was charged with Obstruction of Justice/Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder

Prosecution.

- Former Rankin County Sheriff Deputy **Daniel Opdyk** was charged with Obstruction of Justice/Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.
- Former Richland Police Department Narcotics Investigator **Joshua Hartfield** was charged with Obstruction of Justice/Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree and Conspiracy to Commit Obstruction of Justice/Hinder Prosecution.

In federal court this morning, the six defendants pleaded guilty to 13 federal felony offenses, including civil rights conspiracy, deprivation of rights under color of law, discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence, conspiracy to obstruct justice and obstruction of justice.

"I want to make clear," **continued Fitch**, "that we also work with good, honest, dedicated law enforcement officers in Mississippi every day. My message to anyone who has seen these criminal acts and wonders if they can trust the officers who police their streets is this: The six men that committed these heinous acts are not the rule; they are the exception. Most of the men and women who put on a uniform every day are true to their oath. They put their lives on the line to protect you and to keep your communities safe."

"If we are going to take back our lives and our homes and our cities from criminals, it is absolutely crucial that the courageous and law-abiding citizens of Mississippi and those brave and honest officers be an unbreakable team. My office is committed to being part of rebuilding the trust and the bond that is so strained by incidents like this. Working together, as we did with the U.S. Attorney's Office, FBI, and Mississippi Bureau of Investigation here, it is my hope that we can help these victims begin to heal today and we can help restore confidence in our criminal justice system moving forward," **said General Fitch**.

In the 2022 Legislative Session, the Mississippi Legislature amended Section 45-1-6 of the Mississippi Code to give the Attorney General's Office responsibility for the review and prosecution, following investigation by the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation, of all officer-involved shootings that result in injury or death.

Read General Fitch's full statement **here**.

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