

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Teresa Hamilton Hall

Roanoke County Public Information Director
Office: (540) 772-2010

Jeffrey Scott Easley Pleads No Contest to Capital Murder

Judge sentences Easley to life in prison without the possibility of parole

ROANOKE COUNTY, VA (February 28, 2012) — The man accused of killing a mother and abducting her 12-year-old daughter from the home they shared in Roanoke County, Virginia will spend the rest of his life in prison with no chance of parole.

This afternoon, 33-year-old Jeffrey Scott Easley entered a plea of no contest to capital murder during a motion's hearing in Roanoke County Circuit Court. Easley could have faced the death penalty for killing his girlfriend, 41-year-old Tina Smith, and abducting her then 12-year-old daughter, Brittany Mae Smith, in December 2010. Smith's body was discovered in her home on December 6 and an Amber Alert was quickly issued for her missing child. After an intense search and nationwide media coverage, Easley and Brittany were discovered five days later in San Francisco after a woman recognized Brittany panhandling outside a grocery store. Easley was arrested and Brittany was returned safely to her family in Virginia.

According to the summary of evidence given in court, Tina Smith died from blunt force trauma to the head, strangulation, and suffocation. In court, Easley's defense attorneys suggested that Brittany was more involved in the crime than the prosecution indicated. Brittany was inside the house at the time her mother was killed, but detectives never uncovered any evidence to indicate she participated in her mother's murder.

The Roanoke County Police Department is the agency that oversaw the murder investigation and search for Brittany. The Department's Acting Assistant Chief Chuck Mason was in the courtroom and afterward said he and the department are satisfied with the outcome. "Easley had almost complete access to Brittany for nearly five months prior to the murder. The investigation revealed that during that time Easley gradually increased his influence over the girl - even to the point of isolating her from family members. A text message sent from Tina Smith to a friend on the day of the murder stated that she thought that Easley had actually "brainwashed" her daughter."

After listening to the testimony, Circuit Court Judge James Swanson accepted Easley's no contest plea and found him guilty of capital murder. The judge then dropped the "abduction with intent to defile" charge and sentenced Easley to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Mason said the outcome is the best possible for everyone involved. "Easley is the person responsible for this crime and will spend the rest of his life in prison."

###