

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**After Deadly Knox Bridge Highway Crash, Calhoun Man Pleads Guilty to Vehicular Homicide and DUI,
Sentenced to 30 Years With 10 Years to Serve in Prison
State vs. William Bryan Abernathy**

May 23, 2024 – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that William Bryan Abernathy, 52, of Calhoun, entered a negotiated guilty plea and was sentenced for homicide by vehicle in the first degree (6 counts), serious injury by vehicle (6 counts), reckless driving, and driving under the influence (2 counts).

Superior Court Judge David L. Cannon Jr. sentenced Abernathy as negotiated to 30 years, with the first 10 years to serve in confinement. He was also ordered to receive evaluation and treatment for substance abuse, avoid drug and alcohol use, perform 120 hours of community service, complete a DUI risk reduction program, pay fines, surrender driver's license.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office responded to a four-vehicle crash involving serious injuries on December 10, 2022, on Knox Bridge Highway, just east of Field Landing Road in Canton. Abernathy caused the crash after losing control of his 2006 silver Chevrolet Silverado truck.

Earlier that afternoon, Abernathy consumed alcoholic beverages before driving east on Knox Bridge Highway. Just before 4 p.m., the truck was traveling 76 miles per hour in a 55-mile speed limit zone. As the truck maneuvered around a curve in the right side of the road, Abernathy ran onto the shoulder of the road, overcorrected, then re-entered the highway. The overcorrection caused the defendant to lose control of the vehicle, which traveled counterclockwise and crashed into the driver's side of a 2023 Hyundai Santa Fe headed westbound.

The impact of the crash made the Santa Fe leave the roadway and spin in a counterclockwise direction into oncoming traffic, where it overturned and then was broadsided by an oncoming 2008 GMC cargo van. The force of the two collisions caused the Santa Fe to run off the highway near the woodline.

After striking the Santa Fe, the defendant's truck struck a 2014 Mazda 3 headed westbound. The force of this collision made the defendant's truck and the Mazda 3 spin clockwise and come to rest in a ditch, facing east, on the westbound lane of the highway.

The crash was captured on the dashcam of a vehicle traveling westbound behind the Santa Fe and Mazda 3.

Cherokee Sheriff's Office responded to the crash at approximately 4 p.m. When interviewed by law enforcement, Abernathy initially denied consuming alcohol. He said he did not remember anything and did not know how the accident occurred. After CSO deputies observed the smell of alcohol and balance issues suggesting intoxication, Abernathy admitted to drinking a few beers.

Witnesses reported that Abernathy had been “flying” down the two-lane highway just prior to the accident, zigzagging and attempting to pass on the shoulder of the road.

When blood was drawn at 7:53 p.m. (four hours after the crash) and at 9:51 p.m. (six hours after the crash), the blood alcohol level was .249 and .212 respectively. The legal limit in Georgia is 0.08.

The driver of the Santa Fe, Albert Vito Pallone, 65, and his wife Camilla Pallone, 69, died of blunt force trauma. Evidence shows that both were restrained by seatbelts and that multiple airbags deployed in their vehicle.

The other two drivers survived their injuries, but both had to be extricated from their vehicles. The driver of the Mazda 3 suffered a broken right tibia, fractured sternum, broken ribs, and a collapsed lung. The cargo van driver suffered fractures in the right foot and injuries to the right hand.

“On December 10, 2022, two people lost their lives and two others were seriously injured as a result of this defendant’s decision to operate a vehicle while intoxicated,” said Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb, who prosecuted this case on behalf of the State. “During the plea hearing, the courtroom was filled to capacity with family members and law enforcement officers showing their support of the victims. The Pallones were much loved by their family and their community.”

Albert and Camilla Pallone had three children, five grandchildren, and one grandchild. The couple resided in Emerson, Bartow County, where Albert Pallone served as the city’s mayor. During the plea hearing, family members provided victim impact statements describing their loss.

“This tragedy could easily have been avoided had this defendant made the responsible decision to refrain from driving his vehicle that day. There is never a reason to put lives in danger by driving while intoxicated,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “Our hope is that the sentence provides some closure to those who were injured and the families and friends who lost loved ones.”

This case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Pete Lamb and investigated by the Cherokee Sheriff’s Office.

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The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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