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Attorney General Steve Marshall Announces Settlement with Victims' Families in Jimmy O'Neal Spencer Case

(MONTGOMERY)—Attorney General Steve Marshall announced that the State of Alabama will pay the maximum damages that may be awarded under state law —\$1 million*—to the families of Jimmy O'Neal Spencer's three alleged murder victims. The families allege that the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles wrongfully paroled and failed to supervise Spencer, resulting in the deaths of Marie Martin, Colton Lee and Martha Reliford.

Attorney General Marshall recused himself and was not a part of the settlement negotiations, having previously known two of the victims.

Prior to his release and subsequent murder spree, Jimmy O'Neal Spencer had lived a life of crime stretching across three decades, beginning in 1984 at the age of 19. Spencer was a career criminal convicted and imprisoned for numerous serious property and violent crimes, as well as for numerous disciplinary infractions in prison and for several successful escapes from prison. On two separate occasions, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. In one case, Spencer attempted to burglarize an occupied home and, refusing to retreat, had to be shot by the homeowner.

Despite all of this, Spencer was granted parole on November 2, 2017. Spencer was released to a homeless shelter in Birmingham where he was supposed to remain for six months; yet, after only three weeks, he left. Spencer traveled to Guntersville, Alabama, where he had several run-ins with law enforcement and was charged for multiple violations of the law, including: traffic offenses, possession of drug paraphernalia, attempting to elude police, resisting arrest, and illegal possession of a firearm. Nonetheless, his parole was not revoked.

Less than six months after being released, in July of 2018, Spencer allegedly murdered Martha Reliford through blunt-force trauma to her head. Ms. Reliford's body was discovered only after the bodies of Marie Martin and her seven-year-old grandson, Colton Lee, were found in a nearby home. They also had been brutally murdered.

Speaking after the settlement was finalized, Attorney General Marshall said, "Marie Martin, Colton Lee and Martha Reliford died horrifically and senselessly at the hands of a monster — Jimmy O'Neal Spencer." Marshall continued, "Ms. Reliford and Mrs. Martin, whom I knew personally, have been on my mind since July. Every time I think



of what they suffered through, I get angry. I am angry, certainly at Jimmy O'Neal Spencer, but I am also angry that a process designed to protect the public from deviant criminals like Spencer utterly failed them, as well as little Colton. Sadly, we know that these victims aren't the only ones that have been failed by our broken system of pardons and paroles, and that is why I continue to advocate for much-needed legislative reforms."

** The actual amount received by the families will be less attorneys' fees.*

Note: Spencer was charged with capital murder in August 2018. He is currently awaiting trial in the Kilby Correctional Facility in Montgomery, Alabama. Defendants in criminal cases are presumed innocent until proven guilty.