

July 18, 2024

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Attorney General Marshall Releases Statement on the Execution of Convicted Murderer Keith Gavin

(Montgomery) – Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall issued the following statement after the execution of twice-convicted murder, Keith Gavin, at the William C. Holman Correctional Facility in Atmore, Alabama:

Tonight, Keith Gavin was executed by lethal injection after having been convicted by a jury of his peers for the murder of William Clinton Clayton, Jr. in Centre, Alabama.

There is no doubt about Gavin’s guilt for this heinous offense. In 1998, Gavin was identified by four witnesses, including his own cousin, for walking up to a Corporate Express van outside a Regions Bank, where he shot and killed the driver, William Clayton. He subsequently stole the van and drove off with the victim as Clayton’s life slipped away.

William Clayton was a devoted father of seven who had just finished his workday and had stopped to get cash for a date with his wife. He was slain in cold blood by a repeat murderer. I cannot imagine the shock, pain, and frustration that William’s family has endured over the last 26 years. I pray his family finds solace in the long-awaited justice by the State of Alabama.

Attorney General Marshall cleared the execution to commence at 6:15 p.m. CT.

Keith Gavin’s officially pronounced time of death was 6:32 p.m. CT.

Summary of Facts of the Case

Gavin was convicted of murder in Illinois on June 9, 1982. In February 1998, just months after he was released from prison, he and his cousin, Dewayne Meeks, traveled to Fort Payne, Alabama, for the purposes of picking up girls, and for Gavin to get away “because he had been gone a long time.” Meeks lived in Chicago but had been raised in the Fort Payne area and had a daughter living there. Gavin and Meeks stayed the weekend in Fort Payne and then returned to Chicago.

In March, Gavin wanted to return to Fort Payne to see a girl he met during the February trip. Gavin and Meeks traveled from Chicago to Chattanooga, Tennessee, along with Meeks’s wife and son, on March 6, 1998. Gavin had no luck finding the girl he wanted



to visit, and he and Meeks ended up in Centre, Alabama, looking for her. While in downtown Centre, Gavin walked up to a Corporate Express van outside Regions Bank and shot and killed the driver, William Clinton Clayton, Jr. There were four eyewitnesses to the crime, two of whom positively identified Gavin as the shooter. After shooting Clayton, Gavin pushed him into the passenger's side of the van and drove away.

Meeks testified against Gavin at his capital murder trial. He stated that while he and Gavin were at a traffic light outside of Regions Bank, Gavin told him that he was going to ask someone for directions. Gavin got out of the truck and walked over to a van. Meeks then realized Gavin had a pistol, and he saw Gavin fire two shots into the van. Meeks shouted at Gavin, asked what he was doing, then drove away. Gavin followed him in the van. Gavin honked the horn and flashed the lights in an attempt to get Meeks to stop, but Meeks refused because he was scared.

Danny Smith, an investigator with the District Attorney's Office for the Ninth Judicial Circuit, was driving from Fort Payne to Centre when he heard over the radio that there had been a shooting and that both the shooter and the victim were traveling in a white van with lettering on the outside. He saw a van matching that description and began following it. The van pulled over once, then sped away again. It stopped a second time in the middle of the road, near the intersection of Highways 68 and 48. The driver of the van got out of the vehicle and fired a shot at Investigator Smith, then ran into the nearby woods. Investigator Smith checked the van and discovered Clayton, who was barely alive, and called for an ambulance. At trial, Investigator Smith identified Gavin as the person who got out of the van and shot at him.

Other law enforcement officers arrived at the scene and began searching for Gavin but could not locate him. A search dog was brought to the area and tracked Gavin's scent into the woods, where he was found standing in a creek. Gavin attempted to flee but was apprehended. Although no law enforcement officers asked questions of or solicited information from Gavin, he made a statement as he was being brought out of the wooded area that he did not have a gun and had not shot or killed anyone. Law enforcement located the murder weapon near the woods where Gavin had been hiding. Shell casings were found where Clayton was shot and where Gavin shot at Investigator Smith, and ballistics showed that they were fired from this gun.

Clayton was pronounced dead after he arrived at the hospital, having succumbed to his gunshot wounds.

At trial, the prosecution presented overwhelming evidence of Keith Gavin's guilt. A jury of his peers convicted him of capital murder during robbery, murder within twenty years of a prior murder conviction, and attempted murder of a law enforcement officer.

The jury recommended that Gavin be sentenced to death for his heinous crime, and the court agreed.