



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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Niece sentenced to 14 years of incarceration for
killing elderly aunt in Capitol Hill house fire

Washington, D.C. - United States Attorney Kenneth L. Wainstein announced that Sharon Williams, 51, of Oxon Hill, Maryland, was sentenced today in the District of Columbia Superior Court before the Honorable Robert I. Richter to a term of 14 years in prison for intentionally setting a fire at 615 Eighth Street, NE, Washington, D.C., that caused the death of her 78-year-old aunt, Ms. Frances Sanders. Williams pled guilty on November 23, 2004, to one count of voluntary manslaughter.

According to the government's evidence, the offense occurred at approximately 3:00 p.m., on Monday, February 24, 2003. The evening before the fire, witnesses observed Sharon Williams engaged in a verbal argument with occupants of the house, including her aunt, Ms. Sanders. The argument revolved, in part, around a longstanding dispute between the defendant and the Sanders' family over the 1997 death of the defendant's father - Ms. Sanders' brother -- Milton Riddick. As a result of this dispute, Sanders and other family members would not allow the defendant to permanently live in the residence. Ms. Sanders, however, permitted the defendant to stay for short periods of time, including several days immediately preceding the fire. On Monday, February 24, 2003, the defendant left Sanders' home and

went to a grocery store located approximately half a block from the residence. A witness observed the defendant purchase three bottles of lighter fluid. Williams returned to 615 Eighth Street, NE, and set the lighter fluid on fire.

Three family members present in the home were able to escape without serious injury. Ms. Sanders, however, was unable to escape. Her body was located on the second floor of the home and following an autopsy, the manner of death was determined to be a homicide caused by soot and smoke inhalation. Detectives of the Metropolitan Police Department placed Williams under arrest the same day as the fire.

In announcing the sentence, U.S. Attorney Wainstein praised the efforts of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Investigator Eric Pena, Metropolitan Police Department Detectives Dwayne Corbett, Stanley Farmer, Anthony Patterson, Brett Smith, and Elbert Griffin, Victim Witness Advocate Marcey Rinker, litigation technical support specialist Thomas Royal, paralegal specialist Donna Galindo, legal assistant Donice Adams, former Assistant U.S. Attorney Kate Konopka, who indicted the case, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Kimya Jones and John Carlin, who prepared it for trial.

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