

NEWS RELEASE

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Man sentenced to life in prison for cousin's murder

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Derek Ward will spend the rest of his life in prison after a jury convicted him of raping and murdering his cousin, 23-year-old Brittini Ward. The trial, which began on August 19, 2024, ended today with the jury's guilty verdict. The Honorable Carla N. Archie, Superior Court Judge, presided over the trial.

The Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Homicide Team tried Derek Ward, 38, for 1) first-degree murder and 2) first-degree rape. The jury found him *guilty as charged*. Judge Archie sentenced Ward to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In April 2010, Brittini Ward and her family lived in a south Charlotte apartment. Brittini's cousin, Derek Ward, and another relative showed up unannounced at the Ward's apartment and asked if they could stay with them for a while. Brittini and her family hadn't met Derek prior to that visit but allowed him to stay.

Derek and the relative stayed with the Wards for a few days, then left, but the defendant returned alone several days later and continued to stay with the Wards. During the course of his stay, the defendant tried to convince Brittini's family that she was possessed by a demon and, on multiple occasions, they witnessed him choke Brittini.

On May 5, 2010, the defendant and Brittini were alone in the apartment and he raped and strangled Brittini to death. Family members found Brittini unresponsive when they returned home, but waited several hours before calling 911. Weeks later, they told detectives with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department about the defendant's previous assaults of Brittini. Pubic hair combings from the sex assault kit conducted on Brittini included the defendant.

Dawn Ward, the mother of Brittini and aunt of Derek, was previously convicted for charges related to the crimes.

Note: For more information about the District Attorney's Office, visit www.charmeckda.com. For updates and other information, follow @CharMeckDA on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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