



# Maricopa County Attorney

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Jerice Hunter Sentenced to Natural Life for Murdering Her Daughter**

PHOENIX – The mother of a five-year-old girl who disappeared in 2011 will spend the rest of her life in prison after being found guilty last April of her daughter’s murder. Jerice Hunter (D.O.B. 10/13/1973) was also sentenced to a consecutive term of 20 years for child abuse. She was convicted last April on one count of child abuse and one count of first degree murder. The body of her daughter, Jhessye Shockley, has not been found.

“This defendant through her criminal actions violated the very essence of what it means to be a parent and deserves the appropriately severe punishment allowable under Arizona law,” said Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery. “While no sentence can bring back the innocent life that was taken, today’s outcome honors our commitment to secure justice for Jhessye and to hold the defendant accountable for her death.”

Jhessye Shockley was first reported missing on October 11, 2011. After an initial investigation and an extensive search for the child, police arrested Jerice Hunter on November 21 on suspicion of child abuse. No formal charges were filed and Hunter was subsequently released. Detectives and forensic investigators continued to work the case, interviewing witnesses and family members and conducting a four-month search of the Butterfield Station Landfill in Mobile.

Over the course of their investigation, Glendale Police learned that Jhessye Shockley had been absent from school for days and weeks at a time in the two months leading up to her disappearance. The defendant told the school during these periods that her daughter had ringworm and pinkeye, contagious conditions which require a doctor’s permission for her to return to school. She also told the school she had scheduled numerous medical appointments for Jhessye; however, records at the child’s doctor’s office did not support these claims.

Investigators also learned that during this period, the defendant’s 13-year-old daughter saw the defendant beat Jhessye repeatedly and confine her to a closet without food or water. The older child later told police she saw black eyes and bruises all over Jhessye’s body and described the closet as smelling like death.

A neighbor told detectives that one week before Jhessye was reported missing the defendant asked her for a ride to deliver some clothes and shoes to a woman in Tempe who had agreed to purchase them. The neighbor pulled her car up to the back patio gate of the defendant's apartment so the defendant could load the clothing into her trunk. She saw the defendant with a wheeled rectangular suitcase and offered to help her lift it into the trunk of the car. The defendant, who was pregnant with another child at the time, declined the offer for help and lifted the heavy suitcase into the trunk by herself. The defendant also told the neighbor that if the neighbor smelled something bad it was probably from the shoes in the suitcase.

The neighbor and the defendant then drove to an apartment complex in Tempe. The defendant directed the neighbor to park the car near some dumpsters in an empty parking lot on one side of the complex. The defendant claimed that the woman who agreed to purchase the clothing items had told her to leave the items in the dumpster. The neighbor then saw the defendant put on some gloves and then struggle to put the heavy suitcase into the dumpster. When she got back into the car she was not wearing the gloves. The neighbor asked if they should wait for the woman to return and pay the defendant for the items but the defendant said that would not be necessary.

On September 6, 2012, a Maricopa County Grand Jury indicted Jerice Hunter on one count of child abuse and one count of first degree murder. Her trial began on March 2, 2015 and lasted 20 days. On April 27, after four days of deliberations, the jury unanimously found Hunter guilty on both counts and further found that aggravated factors had been proven.

Jerice Hunter has a previous conviction for child abuse in California where she served four years in prison for that offense.

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