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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COUPLE CONVICTED AND SENTENCED FOR INVOLUNTARY MANSLAUGHTER,
ENDANGERING CHILDREN, AND POSSESSION OF DRUGS AFTER TRIAL**

Two transplanted Scioto County residents were each given 10-15 year prison sentences following a 3-day jury trial in the Scioto County Court of Common Pleas concluding on December 13, 2023. 48-year-old Justin Sheets and 39-year-old Amye Knott each faced four felony counts consisting of involuntary manslaughter, endangering children, and possession of fentanyl and methamphetamine. Following approximately one hour of deliberations, the jury convicted Mr. Sheets and Ms. Knott of involuntary manslaughter, a felony 1 level charge, endangering children, a felony 3, and possession of a fentanyl-related compound, a felony 5. Judge Howard H. Harcha III announced the Defendants' punishment immediately following the trial, sentencing both defendants to near-maximum 10-15 year terms in the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections. Ohio law allows for a sentence of 3-11 years for a felony 1 level charge, along with an additional 5.5 year indefinite term. Therefore, the longest sentence Sheets and Knott were facing was an 11-16.5 year term.

On September 17, 2021, a 911 call alerted the Scioto County Sheriff's Office and the Portsmouth Police Department that a baby was found unresponsive and lifeless in her crib after being put down for a nap. Law enforcement and emergency personnel immediately responded to the scene of the call at 1677 Robinson Avenue in Portsmouth. Shortly after their arrival, emergency medical personnel from the Portsmouth Fire Department immediately took control of the child, identified as 11-month-old Karrieonna Filius. These individuals made every attempt to

find any signs of life or resuscitation options, but tragically none existed and Karrieonna's death was called at the scene after discussions with a Southern Ohio Medical Center physician.

While a cause of death was not immediately apparent, an investigation was commenced spearheaded by Special Victims Detective Sergeant Jodi Conkel of the Scioto County Sheriff's Office and Detective Charles Crapyou of the Portsmouth Police Department. Karrieonna's body was sent for autopsy and toxicology at the Montgomery County Coroner's Office. Living at the residence at the time of Karrieonna's death were her parents, Robert Filius and Michaela Hupp, along with Hupp's father Justin Sheets and his fiancée Amye Knott. During initial interviews marijuana use at the home was admitted by all parties. Methamphetamine use was later admitted by the child's parents. Sheets and Knott initially denied all knowledge of any drug abuse in the home aside from the marijuana.

The autopsy and toxicology revealed that Karrieonna's cause of death was due to multiple drug intoxication from fentanyl and fluorofentanyl, both of which are powerful and lethal opioids. Testimony from the forensic pathologist and toxicologist at trial revealed that Karrieonna had fluorofentanyl concentrations in her blood at levels higher than they had ever encountered in their lengthy careers. Further investigation from law enforcement uncovered evidence of ongoing and rampant opioid abuse by Defendants Sheets and Knott in the months, weeks, and days leading up to Karrieonna's death. The investigation revealed that Sheets and Knott were both receiving medically assisted therapy in the form of methadone treatment during this time. Sheets and Knott were manipulating the policies of the treatment center they were attending to continue receiving their methadone on top of their illicit opioid/fentanyl abuse. Investigation and interviews also revealed that both Sheets and Knott had lived the vast majority of their life in other Ohio counties but relocated to Scioto County initially for drug treatment. Following this time in treatment Sheets and Knotts maintained their residency in Scioto County.

At trial, the State of Ohio presented 12 witnesses over a three-day period. Testimony revealed that Karrieonna had entered the bedroom occupied by Sheets and Knott shortly prior to her death. Evidence was presented that this bedroom was where Sheets and Knott kept and used their drugs. Testimony further indicated that Sheets removed the child from his room while Knott was present, but failed to alert her parents about her exposure to their drugs. Quickly thereafter Karrieonna appeared to be tired, which her parents attributed to a sleepless night previously brought on by teething problems. Not suspecting any foul play, she was put down for a nap in her crib by her mother, who then went to the park with her other children while Karrieonna's father Robert Filius remained home. When Mr. Filius checked on her around two hours later, he discovered her lifeless body and immediately alerted Sheets and Knott while he ran to the park to alert the mother. On the ensuing 911 call, Sheets could be heard making exclamations indicating his responsibility for the baby's death.

The State of Ohio's case was presented by chief assistant and special victims prosecutor Julie Hutchinson along with assistant prosecutor Matthew Loesch. Mr. Sheets and Ms. Knott were represented by local attorneys Gene Meadows and Karyn Justice, respectively. Prior to the trial, Karrieonna's parents Robert Filius and Michaela Hupp entered felony guilty pleas to endangering children and possession of drugs and received prison sentences near the maximum allowed for those charges. On behalf of the Scioto County Prosecutor's Office, Shane Tieman thanks the Portsmouth Police Department, the Scioto County Sheriff's Office, the Portsmouth Fire Department, the Southern Ohio Drug Task Force, the Montgomery County Coroner's Office, and his office's investigators and Special Victims Unit. "This case is a prime example of why our Special Victims Unit was formed," said Mr. Tieman. "I want the people of this County to understand that a murder charge requires either a purposeful act or a death as a result of a violent felony. An involuntary manslaughter charge requires death as a result of any other felony

offense. The actions of these two defendants, which were certainly reckless and horrible, by law fell into the category of involuntary manslaughter. While no prison term will feel like enough of a punishment in a case like this, the sentences given to Defendants Sheets and Knott represent the stiffest punishment my office could have obtained against these two individuals. We hope that by so doing we have honored Karrieonna's memory and brought closure to all those affected by her tragic death."