

V.I. Dept. of Justice Defends Dismissal in 2022 Double Homicide Case, Citing Recanted Testimony and Legal Risk

AG Gordon Rhea says charges against Joshawn Ayala and Anthony Schneider were dropped after the case's sole witness recanted, making it impossible to meet the burden of proof and risking double jeopardy if the case moved forward without stronger evidence.

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V.I.P.D. officers investigate the homicide scene of Arnold Jarvis Jr. at Green Cay Beach on St. Croix, Friday, February 4, 2022. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

ST. CROIX — Attorney General Gordon C. Rhea has issued a public statement defending the V.I. Department of Justice's decision to move for the dismissal of first-degree murder charges

against Joshawn Ayala and Anthony Schneider, the two men accused in the 2022 killings of [Stacie Schjang](#) and [Arnold Jarvis Jr.](#)

The case, Rhea explained, hinges on a single witness who originally linked the defendants to the murders but has since recanted his statement in a sworn affidavit. With that critical piece of evidence now undermined, prosecutors determined they could not meet the constitutional requirement of proving guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

“In a criminal case,” Rhea stated, “the prosecution must prove the defendant’s guilt ‘beyond a reasonable doubt.’ It is not enough to show that a defendant might, could, or even probably, have committed a crime”.

Rather than risk an acquittal that would forever bar the government from prosecuting the defendants again—even if stronger evidence emerged—prosecutors filed a motion to dismiss the case without prejudice. That distinction allows charges to be refiled in the future if new information becomes available.

On Wednesday, VIDOJ prosecutors formally submitted a motion to dismiss the charges. The matter now awaits action by Presiding Judge Yvette Ross-Edwards, who had not yet ruled on the motion as of press time. However, sources familiar with the case say an order of dismissal is likely imminent.

The DOJ stressed that the decision does not mean the case is closed. “By asking the court to dismiss the case ‘without prejudice,’ the Government preserves the right to again charge the defendants with murder if new evidence is found. Thus, the proper course was the one the prosecutor followed,” said Rhea.

The department also urged the public to come forward with any information. “Community cooperation is essential to ensuring that those who commit acts of violence are brought to justice, and that the families and friends of victims receive the closure they deserve”.

Stacie Schjang was fatally shot inside her home in January 2022 by a stray bullet, with reports at the time suggesting the bullet was intended for someone else. A week later, Arnold Jarvis Jr., believed to be the target in Schjang’s killing, was himself gunned down at Green Cay Beach.

In February 2023, maternal cousins Ayala and Schneider were [arrested in Georgia](#) by the Muscogee County Sheriff’s Office Drug, Gang and Fugitive Unit, in coordination with the U.S. Marshals Service. Both men were extradited to the Virgin Islands to stand trial.

The path to trial was complicated by a series of legal disputes between prosecutors and defense attorneys. While the identification of one of the defendants by a minor was ruled admissible, another key piece of evidence—statements made by Jarvis before his death—faced intense scrutiny.

Jarvis had reportedly identified the defendants as his attackers in a statement to police. But defense attorneys argued that admitting the deceased victim’s statement would violate their clients’ rights.

Ayala’s counsel labeled the statements inadmissible hearsay, while Schneider’s attorney said, “No limiting instruction would possibly cure the prejudice that would result from the use of the testimony.... Admission of the prejudicial testimony would so infect the entire trial that any resulting conviction would violate due process.”

The court had not yet ruled on the matter when the DOJ decided to file its motion to dismiss.

In the DOJ's press release, the department acknowledged the emotional toll these unresolved cases have taken on the St. Croix community, particularly the families of the victims. "We understand the deep pain these unresolved tragedies have caused for the victims' loved ones and the broader St. Croix community," the statement read. "Justice cannot be served without the active participation of the public—our system relies on it".

Investigators, according to the release, are still pursuing leads and remain committed to holding those responsible accountable.

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