

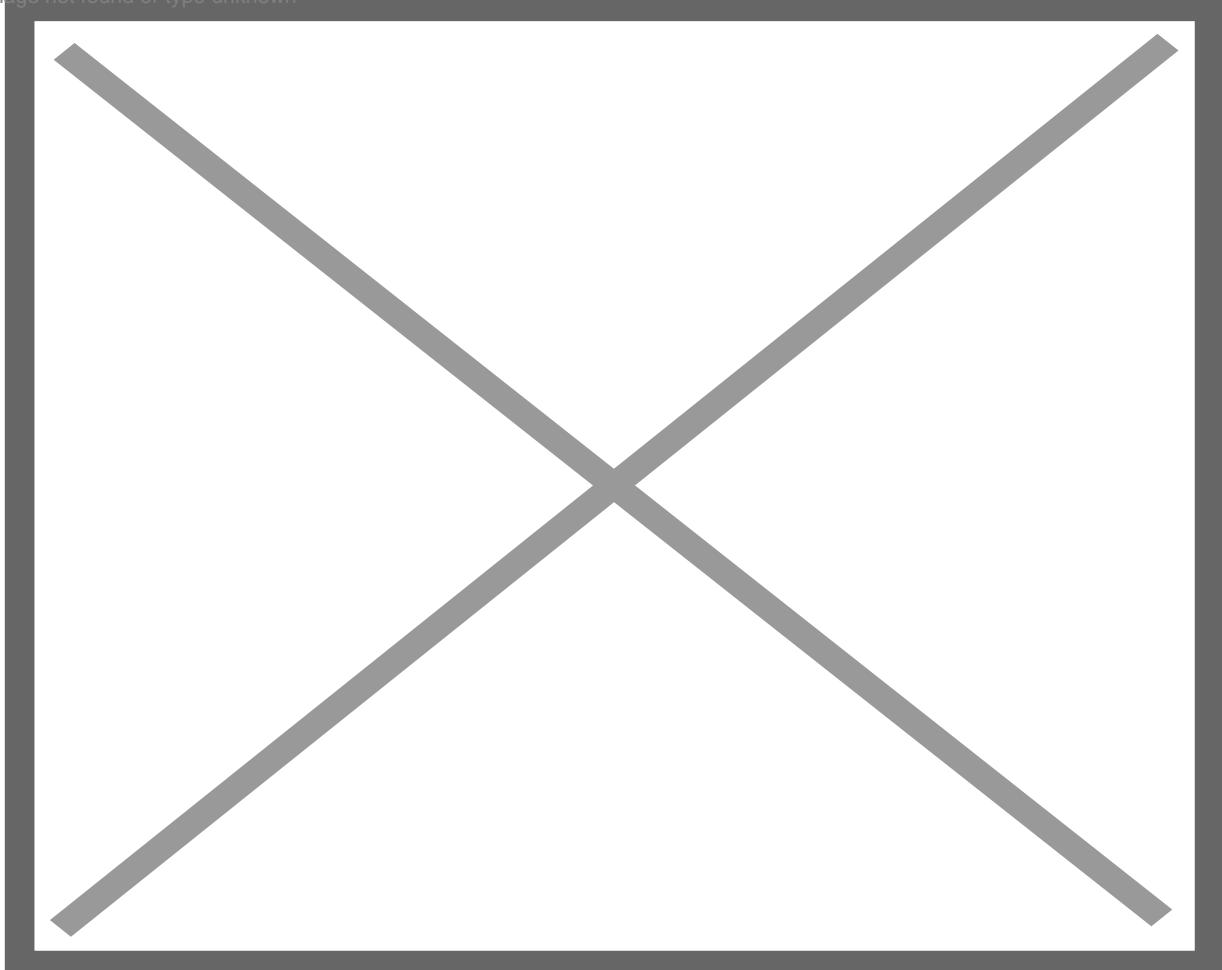
After Life Sentence in Lorraine Village Murder, Kertis Tonge Files Appeal Challenging Jury Verdicts

Tonge, convicted in September of murder and related offenses for the 2024 shooting that killed Quanza Heath, filed a notice of appeal the same day he was sentenced to life without parole, questioning evidence sufficiency and several trial court rulings.

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Janeka Simon **November 24, 2025**

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Mugshot of Kertis Tonge Jr. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — Two months after a jury found Kertis Tonge Jr. guilty of murder and six related crimes in the 2024 Lorraine Village shooting that killed Quanza Heath, Tonge has now been sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole — and has simultaneously moved to challenge the verdicts before the Supreme Court of the Virgin Islands. His appeal raises questions

about the sufficiency of the evidence and several rulings made during trial, setting the stage for a new round of legal proceedings in the high-profile case.

Tonge was convicted in September of first- and second-degree murder, first- and third-degree assault, unauthorized possession of a firearm, and possession of ammunition. Judge Ernest Morris Jr. imposed the life-without-parole sentence last week.

According to trial evidence, the case stemmed from an incident on October 23, 2024, when Tonge arrived uninvited at an apartment in Lorraine Village shortly before noon. After a dispute with the occupants, he fired three shots into the residence, which at the time was occupied by Heath, an adult woman, and multiple children. Emergency responders transported Heath to the Juan F. Luis Hospital, where he later died from multiple gunshot wounds.

On the same day as his sentencing hearing, counsel for Tonge filed a notice of appeal. The filing asks whether the evidence presented at trial was sufficient to support the jury's verdicts on all charges. It also challenges several decisions made by Judge Morris, including his denial — on two occasions — of defense motions to dismiss the first-degree murder charge.

The notice further questions the judge's decision to allow prosecutors to add a second-degree murder charge in a third amended information during the course of the trial. In addition, the appeal raises concerns regarding jury selection, arguing that the court erred by declining to submit the defendant's proposed preliminary questions to potential jurors.

Following the jury's verdict in September, Attorney General Gordon C. Rhea credited the result to the work of prosecutors Robert Pickett and Jasmin Griffin, Department of Justice support staff, Virgin Islands Police Department officers, witnesses, and the jury.