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## County of Warren

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### PRESS RELEASE

**Subject: March 19, 2016 Incident at Panther Valley  
Allamuchy, New Jersey 07820  
Decedent: Gage Theard**

On Wednesday, August 17, 2016, the Warren County Grand Jury determined that a 20-year-old woman who had shot and killed an attacker in her home in March of 2016 was justified in the use of deadly force.

An extensive investigation was conducted and revealed the following:

On Saturday, March 19, 2016, at approximately 4:12 a.m., Troopers from the New Jersey State Police responded to a residence on Alexanders Road in Panther Valley in response to a report that a resident, who had been attacked and sexually assaulted, had shot an attacker inside her home.

Law enforcement officers and medical personnel responded to the scene and found 24-year-old Gage Theard on the second floor, deceased. The Morris County Medical Examiner conducted an autopsy and determined that Mr. Theard had succumbed to gunshot wounds.

Mr. Theard, whose residence was listed as Milton, Florida where he was attending Naval Flight School, was the former fiancé of the resident and victim, Rachael Morrissey. It was learned that Ms. Morrissey had broken off the engagement and ended their relationship earlier in March. Since the breakup, Mr. Theard engaged in numerous failed attempts to rekindle the relationship.

On March 17, 2016, Mr. Theard left Milton, Florida and drove north stopping in Winchester, Virginia. Upon arriving in Winchester, he contacted Ms. Morrissey electronically in the early afternoon hours of March 18, 2016, requesting to see her to discuss their breakup. Ms. Morrissey initially agreed to meet with Mr. Theard but after failing to agree on a time and place for the meeting, Ms. Morrissey ultimately advised Mr. Theard that she was not willing to resume their relationship and that she had plans to meet a male friend that evening.

After receiving that communication, Mr. Theard proceeded to the Lowe's Home Improvement store in Winchester, Virginia where he purchased duct tape and zip ties at approximately 5:25 pm. After completing the purchase, Mr. Theard reached out to Ms. Morrissey once again and pleaded with her to give him another chance. Having received yet another unfavorable response, Mr. Theard left Winchester, Virginia and drove to Allamuchy, New Jersey. Upon arriving, he parked his vehicle outside of Ms. Morrissey's gated community and proceeded on foot to her residence.

At approximately 10:30 p.m., Mr. Theard armed with a 9 mm handgun, two knives and a duffle bag containing the zip ties, duct tape, and another magazine for his hand gun, rang Ms. Morrissey's door bell. As she opened the door, he forced his way into her home, and attacked her. She managed to lock herself in her room; but, Mr. Theard, undeterred, successfully broke through the door.

During the encounter, Mr. Theard bound Ms. Morrissey utilizing the zip ties and duct tape that he had purchased earlier and proceeded to sexually assault her. After the sexual assault, Ms. Morrissey attempted to escape but Mr. Theard grabbed her, placed the blade of his knife to her neck, and threatened to kill her if she tried anything again.

Becoming more and more unstable, Mr. Theard proceeded to secure Ms. Morrissey to a chair with zip ties and duct tape and began to speak to her about death and suicide for hours after having come to the realization that what he had done was criminal. Faced with what he had done, he told Ms. Morrissey that he would have to die as there was no way out of the situation for him. During this time, Ms. Morrissey asked Mr. Theard if she was going to live to which he replied "he did not know."


Ms. Morrissey pleaded with Mr. Theard to leave her secured in the home and leave. Unwilling to do so, Mr. Theard emptied his handgun, demonstrated how to use it, reloaded it, handed it to her, and then directed her to shoot him in the head. After she refused to do so, he issued an ultimatum to Ms. Morrissey stating that if she did not comply with his request; he would shoot her and then turn the gun on himself.

In an attempt to escape the situation with her life, but not wanting to kill Mr. Theard, Ms. Morrissey stated that she shot him once in the rear shoulder blade area. Upon being shot, Mr. Theard began to rise and turn toward her, yelling. Fearing for her life, Ms. Morrissey fired once more, striking Mr. Theard in the shoulder area. After firing the second shot, she immediately ran from the residence, called 911, and awaited the arrival of law enforcement.

After the New Jersey State Police arrived on scene, Ms. Morrissey was transported to the hospital where she was, examined, treated and, released. Immediately after her release from the hospital, Ms. Morrissey responded to the New Jersey State Police, Hope Barracks and voluntarily provided an audiotaped statement. Days later, Ms. Morrissey provided a comprehensive, videotaped statement and remained cooperative throughout the investigation.

The investigation was conducted by the New Jersey State Police, NJSP Major Crimes Unit, and the Warren County Prosecutor's Office Major Crimes Unit.

Approved by:



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RICHARD T. BURKE  
WARREN COUNTY PROSECUTOR

Dated: August 25, 2016