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RAFIQ THOMPSON NOW FACING TWO HOMICIDE CHARGES AS NEW DETAILS EMERGE FROM THE MURDER INVESTIGATION

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (April 14, 2022) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Upper Merion Police Chief Thomas Nolan announced today the addition of a new charge—Death of An Unborn Child—to the charges faced by Rafiq Thompson, 38, of Philadelphia, who was arrested yesterday for the murder of Tamara Cornelius, shot to death at a King of Prussia gas station Friday night, April 8, 2022. Steele and Nolan also shared additional details revealed during the investigation about the time leading up to Cornelius' murder.

Cornelius was shot to death at approximately 10:22 p.m. at an Exxon gas station on North Gulph Road. A joint homicide investigation by Upper Merion Township Police and the Montgomery County Detective Bureau found through video surveillance and witness accounts that Cornelius pulled up to the pump, and Thompson pulls up directly behind her in his vehicle, which has its headlights turned off. Cornelius exits her vehicle and begins to pump gas as Thompson exits his vehicle. In the video, Thompson appears to be talking to Cornelius as she is pumping gas and after a few seconds, Thompson raises his right arm and points a dark-colored handgun directly at Cornelius and begins shooting. Cornelius, who is obviously struck, attempts to get away through the parking lot as she stumbles and falls several times. The video shows Thompson following directly behind her continuing to shoot. Then as Cornelius collapses onto the ground, Thompson stands over her for a brief second before walking back to his vehicle and driving off. The investigation recovered a McDonald's restaurant receipt in Thompson's vehicle that showed he purchased food at 11:49 p.m., approximately one hour and 27 minutes after the murder. Video surveillance confirms his vehicle went through the drive-through lane of the restaurant.

Cornelius was transported to Paoli Hospital and pronounced dead less than an hour later. An autopsy on Cornelius' body determined that she was shot four times and that she was 14-weeks pregnant at the time of her murder.

The homicide investigation further revealed that the defendant and victim had a prior relationship. A take-out bag from The Cheesecake Factory at the King of Prussia Mall was found on the front seat of the victim's car. The investigation found that in the days leading up to the murder, Thompson had texted the victim 93 times

and called her 21 times between April 4 and April 6, which Cornelius did not answer. On April 8 at 5:55 p.m., Thompson texts to invite her out to dinner, and Cornelius responded with several phone calls between them. At 9:11 p.m. they are seen in mall video surveillance meeting outside of The Cheesecake Factory, then walking toward the restaurant's entrance. The waiter who served them told detectives that the two appeared to be having a contentious conversation, and when he brought the food to the table, Thompson had left. Mall surveillance show Thompson leaving the mall vestibule area alone at 9:43 p.m. Cornelius asked the waiter to box the food for take-out, paid the bill, then left the restaurant by herself, with mall video showing her exiting the restaurant at 10:15 p.m. and walking toward the parking garage.

On Monday morning, April 11, a worker applying fertilizer to a lawn at Executive Terrace, located at 455 S. Gulph Road, saw a black semi-automatic handgun lying in a flower bed, as well as a magazine lying a few feet away. The gun had a bullet in the chamber, which he removed. The worker turned the firearm into police, and a ballistic examination determined the firearm was used by Thompson in the murder. Thompson's prior criminal convictions make him a Person Not to Possess a Firearm. Detectives are investigating how the defendant illegally obtained the firearm used in the murder.

Thompson, who was on state parole at the time of the murder, will be arraigned today on the new charge of Murder of an Unborn Child. He now faces charges of First-Degree Murder, Third-Degree Murder, Murder of an Unborn Child, Person Not to Possess a Firearm and Possessing an Instrument of Crime. Bail is not available for First-Degree Murder, and Thompson was remanded to the Montgomery County Correctional Facility. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 2:45 p.m., April 25, 2022 before Magisterial District Judge Patrick Krause.

The case will be prosecuted by District Attorney Steele and Assistant District Attorney Samantha Arena, a member of the Firearms Unit.

Approved for release:
Kevin R. Steele

CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.