

RECEIVED

Jan 09 2026

SC Court of Appeals

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE COURT OF APPEALS

Appeal from Horry County

Honorable Michael G. Nettles, Circuit Court Judge

THE STATE,

RESPONDENT,

V.

SAMANTHA GWEN WATTS,

APPELLANT

APPELLATE CASE NO. 2025-001500

RECORD ON APPEAL

SARAH E. SHIPE
Appellate Defender

ALAN WILSON
Attorney General

South Carolina Commission on Indigent
Defense
Division of Appellate Defense
PO Box 11589
Columbia, SC 29211-1589
(803) 734-1330

MELODY J. BROWN
Senior Assistant Deputy Attorney General
Rembert Dennis Building
1000 Assembly Street, Room 519
Columbia, SC 29201
(803)734-3727

ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

ATTORNEYS FOR RESPONDENT

INDEX

INDEX i

PLEA QUALIFICATION HEARING TRANSCRIPT DATED JULY 10, 2025.....1

PLEA HEARING TRANSCRIPT DATED JULY 14, 202515

MOTION TO RECONSIDER SENTENCING HEARING TRANSCRIPT
DATED JULY 17, 202527

RULE 203 (d)(1)(B)(iv) WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF BASIS FOR APPEAL36

INDICTMENT37

SENTENCE SHEET39

CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL40

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA * GENERAL SESSIONS
 COUNTY OF HORRY * TRANSCRIPT OF RECORD

-----X
 STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA *
 vs. * Case No. 2023-GS-26-01661,
 * 2023-GS-26-01662
 SAMANTHA GWEN WATTS, *
 *
 Defendant. *

-----X
 STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA *
 vs. * Case No. 2023-GS-26-05429
 PAYTON WATTS, *
 *
 Defendant. *

July 10, 2025

PLEA QUALIFICATION HEARING

B E F O R E:

The Honorable Michael Nettles, Presiding Judge

A P P E A R A N C E S:

Nancy Livesay, Esq.
 Brandon Lanier, Esq.
 Assistant Solicitors for the State

Scott Graustein, Esq.
 Attorney for Defendant Samantha Watts

Jarrett Bouchette, Esq.
 Attorney for Defendant Payton Watts

Court Stenographer: Bobbi Fisher, RPR
 SC Official Court Reporter III

I N D E X

DESCRIPTION	PAGE
Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts	3, 10
Plea Qualification of Payton Watts	6

E X H I B I T S

(None.)

Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

P R O C E E D I N G S

(The following proceedings started at 2:47 p.m.):

THE COURT: Yes, sir. You're recognized.

MR. LANIER: May it please the Court. Judge, we're here today for a matter that was set for a July 14th trial, first on the roster. It's the State of South Carolina versus Samantha Gwen Watts, true-billed Indictment 2023-GS-26-01662 for murder.

Your Honor, it's our understanding that Defendant Samantha Watts is here to plead guilty today. We're here to qualify that plea and leave sentencing in abeyance for Monday so the victims can be here and be heard.

Also, State of South Carolina versus Payton Watts. This is true-billed Indictment 2023-GS-26-05429 for murder. State's recommendation on that is going to be a 30- to 40-year cap.

On Samantha Watts, it's going to be without recommendations.

If I may approach the Court with the sentencing sheets.

THE COURT: Get defense counsel to sign this as well.

MR. GRAUSTEIN: Is that mine?

MR. BOUCHETTE: Probably not. Let's see.

(Pause in the proceedings while the Court reviews documents.)

THE COURT: Due to the nature of the case, we're going to

Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts

1 do these individually. We'll do Ms. Watts first.

2 Yes, sir. Do you represent Ms. Watts?

3 MR. GRAUSTEIN: I do, Your Honor.

4 THE COURT: Have you explained to her the offense of
5 murder, the fact that this is a violent offense, a most
6 serious offense, and the collateral consequences therefrom?

7 MR. GRAUSTEIN: I have, Your Honor.

8 THE COURT: And have you explained that this is a
9 non-parolable offense and, for all intents and purposes, it
10 would be day for day?

11 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, I have.

12 THE COURT: And how does she wish to plead?

13 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Guilty, Your Honor.

14 THE COURT: Do you agree with her decision to do so?

15 MR. GRAUSTEIN: I understand why she's pleading, yes,
16 Your Honor.

17 THE COURT: And do you feel, if called upon to do so, the
18 State could prove her guilty beyond a reasonable doubt?

19 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, they could.

20 THE COURT: Ms. Watts, are you under the influence of any
21 drugs or alcohol here today?

22 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: No, sir.

23 THE COURT: Are you experiencing any kind of physical or
24 mental problem that prevents you from understanding what we're
25 doing here?

Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts

5

1 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: No, sir.

2 THE COURT: I want you to pay very close attention as the
3 State summarizes the facts that bring us here today with
4 regard to your particular case.

5 MR. LANIER: May it please the Court, Your Honor.

6 Between the dates of January 8th and 9th of 2023 at [REDACTED]
7 Green Sea Road in the Green Sea section of Horry County, the
8 defendant, Samantha Watts, along with her 16-year-old son at
9 the time, Payton Watts, did, with malice aforethought, cause
10 the death of the victim, Corey Adam Soles, who was 29 at the
11 time; specifically, she aided and abetted her son, Payton, in
12 striking the victim, Corey Adam Soles, eight times to the back
13 of the head with a blunt object while he was in a wheelchair,
14 unable to defend himself.

15 I will note for the Court that Payton Watts struck the
16 defendant from behind. He didn't face him. He did so from
17 behind.

18 These two defendants acted together in coordination to
19 get rid of the body, which they ended up dumping off Primrose
20 Drive --

21 THE COURT: Might counsel approach the bench for one
22 moment.

23 COURT REPORTER: Did you want this on the record?

24 THE COURT: No.

25 COURT REPORTER: No? Okay.

Plea Qualification of Payton Watts

1 BENCH CONFERENCE

2 (A bench conference was held off the record.)

3 MR. LANIER: And, Judge, just to finish off, the body was
4 recovered.

5 And those are the operative facts in this case.

6 THE COURT: Ms. Watts, are those facts true?

7 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

8 THE COURT: Are you indeed guilty of murder?

9 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: I'm not but I have to say I am.

10 THE COURT: Okay. I'm going to give you an opportunity
11 to discuss this matter with your lawyer.

12 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: I'm done discussing it. I'm
13 pleading guilty.

14 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Let's go talk real quick.

15 (Pause in the proceedings.)

16 MR. BOUCHETTE: Your Honor, if you'd like to take up
17 Payton's plea, I'm happy to do so, or I'm happy to wait for --

18 THE COURT: That might be the better thing to do. It
19 appears they might take a while.

20 Yes, sir. Do you represent Mr. Watts -- Mr. Payton
21 Watts?

22 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, sir.

23 THE COURT: Have you explained to him the offense of
24 murder, the elements of the offense, potential defenses, and
25 his constitutional rights?

Plea Qualification of Payton Watts

7

1 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, sir.

2 THE COURT: How does he wish to plead?

3 MR. BOUCHETTE: Guilty.

4 THE COURT: Do you agree with his decision to do so?

5 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, sir.

6 THE COURT: Do you feel, if called upon to do so, the
7 State could prove him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt?

8 MR. BOUCHETTE: I believe they could.

9 THE COURT: And does he understand this is a violent
10 offense that adversely affects his custody status as a most
11 serious offense and the collateral consequences therefrom?

12 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, Your Honor.

13 THE COURT: Does he understand that this sentence, for
14 all intents and purposes, will be day for day?

15 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, sir.

16 THE COURT: Mr. Watts, are you under the influence of any
17 drugs or alcohol here today?

18 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: No, Your Honor.

19 THE COURT: Are you experiencing any kind of physical or
20 mental problem that prevents you from understanding what's
21 going on?

22 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: No, Your Honor.

23 THE COURT: All right. Pay very close attention as the
24 State summarizes the facts that bring us here today with
25 regard to your particular events.

Plea Qualification of Payton Watts

1 MR. LANIER: May it please the Court, Your Honor.

2 Between the dates of January 8th and 9th, 2023, at [REDACTED]
3 Green Sea Road in the Green Sea section of Horry County, the
4 defendant, Payton Watts, along with Co-defendant Samantha
5 Watts, with malice aforethought, did cause the death of the
6 victim, Corey Adam Soles; specifically, Defendant Payton Watts
7 struck the victim with a blunt object multiple times, causing
8 his death. This is known through surveillance video and
9 physical and forensic evidence.

10 THE COURT: All right. Mr. Watts, are those facts true?

11 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

12 THE COURT: Are you indeed guilty of murder?

13 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

14 THE COURT: Do you understand that, when you enter a
15 plea, you're giving up your right to a jury trial? You
16 understand that, don't you?

17 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

18 THE COURT: Have you discussed these matters and your
19 right to a jury trial with your lawyer?

20 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

21 THE COURT: Have you understood those conversations?

22 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

23 THE COURT: All right. Are you satisfied with your
24 lawyer?

25 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

Plea Qualification of Payton Watts

9

1 THE COURT: Has anybody promised you anything, threatened
2 you, pressured you, or mistreated you in any way, shape, or
3 form in an effort to get you to plead guilty here today?

4 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: No, Your Honor.

5 THE COURT: Has it been your decision to plead guilty?

6 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

7 THE COURT: Are you indeed guilty?

8 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

9 THE COURT: Have you understood all my questions?

10 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

11 THE COURT: Have your answers been truthful?

12 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

13 THE COURT: Do you understand that you have ten days to
14 appeal any decision I might render here today?

15 DEFENDANT P. WATTS: Yes, Your Honor.

16 THE COURT: Based on your testimony, I find there's a
17 substantial factual basis for your plea, and your decision has
18 been freely and voluntarily entered into knowingly and
19 intelligently and with the consent of competent counsel with
20 whom you say you're satisfied.

21 I'll accept your plea and be glad to hear from you and
22 your lawyer for sentencing on Monday morning.

23 MR. BOUCHETTE: Yes, sir.

24 THE COURT: Anything further?

25 MR. BOUCHETTE: Not at this time.

1 THE COURT: Very good.

2 Mr. Graustein -

3 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, sir.

4 THE COURT: - have you discussed these matters with your
5 client?

6 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, Your Honor.

7 THE COURT: All right. And she understands that, if she
8 maintains her innocence, I cannot accept the plea. She
9 understands that, doesn't she?

10 MR. GRAUSTEIN: She does, Your Honor, and we have just
11 discussed it, and she tells me she is ready to proceed.

12 THE COURT: Okay. And you have explained and had a great
13 deal of conversation with her about "the hand of one is the
14 hand of all"?

15 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, I have.

16 THE COURT: All right. And she indicates to you that she
17 is indeed guilty?

18 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, sir, she has.

19 THE COURT: And, Mr. Solicitor, am I mistaken in that
20 there's -- isn't there video surveillance -

21 MR. LANIER: Yes, Your Honor.

22 THE COURT: - of both of them engaged in this act?

23 MR. LANIER: There's video surveillance as well as
24 physical evidence and witness testimony.

25 THE COURT: Okay. Very good.

Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts

11

1 All right. I'm going to ask you to recite the operative
2 facts for which she is pleading guilty.

3 MR. LANIER: Yes, Your Honor. Between the dates of
4 January 8th and 9th, 2023, at [REDACTED] Green Sea Road in the Green
5 Sea section of Horry County, the defendant, Samantha Watts,
6 along with Co-defendant Payton Watts, did, with malice
7 aforethought, cause the death of the victim, Corey Adam Soles;
8 specifically, the defendant was present and aided and abetted
9 her co-defendant while the victim was struck with a blunt
10 object multiple times, causing his death.

11 This is known through surveillance video and physical and
12 forensic evidence as well as multiple witnesses' statements.

13 THE COURT: All right. Mrs. Watts, are those facts true?

14 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

15 THE COURT: Are you indeed guilty of murder?

16 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

17 THE COURT: All right. You're standing before me
18 pleading guilty but you don't have to plead guilty to
19 anything. You could exercise your right to a jury trial. As
20 a matter of fact, we have a jury coming in Monday to hear this
21 case if you elect to proceed forward with the jury trial.

22 You've talked with your lawyer about your right to a jury
23 trial, haven't you?

24 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

25 THE COURT: And you have understood those conversations,

1 haven't you?

2 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

3 THE COURT: All right. And you understand, in no
4 uncertain terms, that, when you plead guilty, you give up
5 those rights to a jury trial? You understand that, don't you?

6 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

7 THE COURT: All right. Are you satisfied with your
8 lawyer?

9 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

10 THE COURT: Has anybody promised you anything, threatened
11 you, pressured you, or mistreated you in any way, shape, or
12 form in an effort to get you to plead guilty here today?

13 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: No, sir.

14 THE COURT: All right. Has it been your decision to
15 plead guilty?

16 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

17 THE COURT: All right. Has anybody promised you
18 anything, threatened you, pressured you, or mistreated you in
19 any way, shape, or form?

20 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: No, sir. Not -- a little bit.

21 THE COURT: Say that again.

22 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: No. Never mind.

23 THE COURT: All right. Have you understood all my
24 questions?

25 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

Plea Qualification of Samantha Watts

13

1 THE COURT: Have your answers been truthful?

2 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

3 THE COURT: Do you understand that you have ten days to
4 appeal any decision I might render here today?

5 DEFENDANT S. WATTS: Yes, sir.

6 THE COURT: Based on your testimony, I find there's a
7 substantial factual basis for your plea; that your decision
8 was made freely and voluntarily, knowingly and intelligently
9 with the consent of competent counsel with whom you say you're
10 satisfied. I'll accept your plea, and we'll hear from the
11 State with regard to sentencing on Monday and hear mitigation
12 on behalf of each of the defendants.

13 Anything further, Mr. Graustein?

14 MR. GRAUSTEIN: No, Your Honor.

15 THE COURT: We'll stand at ease until Monday morning.

16 MR. LANIER: Thank you, Your Honor.

17 (The hearing concluded at 3:28 p.m.)

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Certificate of Court Reporter

CASE NAME: State v. Samantha Watts and
State v. Payton Watts

DATE OF HEARING: 7/10/2025

I, Bobbi Fisher, do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and correct record of the above-captioned proceedings to the best of my ability; and that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this case; and I have no interest, financial or otherwise, in its outcome.

Bobbi Fisher

/s/ Bobbi Fisher_____

Bobbi Fisher, RPR, Official Court Reporter III

Date Prepared: 8/6/25

NOTE: PURSUANT TO RULE 607(h)(1)(B), SCACR, "A COURT REPORTER SHALL RECEIVE THE FEE OF \$1.00 PER PAGE FOR FURNISHING A COPY OF A PREVIOUSLY PREPARED TRANSCRIPT." ALL REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT (FORM 800) FROM OPPOSING PARTY OR NON-PARTIES MUST BE SENT TO THIS REPORTER AT BFISHER@SCCOURTS.ORG.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA * GENERAL SESSIONS
 *
 COUNTY OF HORRY * TRANSCRIPT OF RECORD

-----X
 STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA *
 *
 vs. * Case No. 2023-GS-26-01661,
 * 2023-GS-26-01662
 SAMANTHA GWEN WATTS, *
 *
 Defendant. *
 -----X

July 14, 2025

PLEA HEARING

B E F O R E:

The Honorable Michael Nettles, Presiding Judge;
 The Honorable Eugene Warr (observing judge)

A P P E A R A N C E S:

Nancy Livesay, Esq.
 Brandon Lanier, Esq.
 Assistant Solicitors for the State

Scott Graustein, Esq.
 Attorney for the Defendant

Court Stenographer: Bobbi Fisher, RPR
 SC Official Court Reporter III

I N D E X

DESCRIPTION	PAGE
Proceedings	3

E X H I B I T S

(None.)

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 (The following proceedings started at 2:47 p.m.):

3 THE COURT: Yes, sir, you're recognized.

4 MR. LANIER: May it please the Court.

5 Your Honor, on the date of January 8th, 2023, at

6 ■ Green Sea Road in the Green Sea section of Horry County,
7 the defendant, Samantha Watts, put into motion a string of
8 events that led to the murder of Corey Adam Soles in the early
9 morning hours on January 9th.

10 She told her son some information that led to an assault
11 by mob in which the victim's leg was broken. He was then
12 wheeled in a wheelchair to a shed in the back of her house.

13 At approximately 5:00 that morning, this defendant and
14 her son, Payton, being two of the only people, other than one
15 other person and a baby who were inside sleeping at the house,
16 she and her son went into that shed, and she, under the "hand
17 of one, hand of all" theory, and her son beat Corey Adam Soles
18 in the back of his head eight times with a blunt force object,
19 killing him.

20 Your Honor, this defendant ran a drug trafficking
21 enterprise at her house. She's not on trial for that, but she
22 had complete control of everything that everyone did in that
23 area. And, Your Honor, I'd ask you to take that into
24 consideration whenever you sentence her.

25 The State does not have a recommendation. She's pleading

1 straight up, but we believe anything under 40 years would be a
2 lack of justice.

3 THE COURT: I'm glad to hear from anybody else who would
4 like to speak on behalf --

5 MR. LANIER: Mr. Scotty Soles.

6 MR. SOLES: Thank you for hearing me, Your Honor. It's
7 been a tough situation that happened a while ago. My son was
8 just killed and mutilated. He left behind some beautiful
9 kids, his mother and father and grandparents. We all miss him
10 every day. Nothing is the same. And the last 2-1/2 years has
11 been nothing but a nightmare, and we're still living it today.
12 We're trying to get closure. We respect your decision and
13 hope you do it in the fullest of your ability.

14 THE COURT: Thank you very much.

15 MR. LANIER: And, Judge, just one more thing: We'd like
16 you to know that all of these fine people over here are here
17 in support and love for Corey Adam Soles, who was taken at too
18 young of an age. Although they may not speak, they are here
19 for him.

20 THE COURT: Very good.

21 MR. LANIER: That's all from the State.

22 THE COURT: I'm glad to hear from the defense with regard
23 to mitigation.

24 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Thank you, Your Honor. As you've heard,
25 it's difficult to represent someone in these circumstances.

1 My client, she's 42 years old. She has three living children.
2 She had four children total. Her oldest daughter died in
3 2009. The children's father died in a car accident in 2007.
4 Shortly thereafter, her oldest daughter, Ivory, was paralyzed
5 in an accident and died on Christmas day in 2009 as a result
6 of complications from medication she was taking. So she was
7 left with the three remaining children.

8 Your Honor, this is a situation -- and I know the State's
9 position is that she had exercised a great deal of control
10 over people. Her two older children had moved out; I don't
11 know how she exercises any control over them. And Payton was
12 still living with her.

13 On the night in question, there were a number of people
14 coming and going from this location and who actually went and
15 saw the victim out where he was. I don't know -- he had
16 already been injured in this assault that had previously
17 occurred. My client was nowhere around when any of this was
18 happening and nobody -- he probably very well could have been
19 taken to the hospital and taken from that location but nobody
20 saw fit to do so.

21 This all transpired over about an 11-hour period, so
22 any -- anything that would make one think that there was some
23 grand plan or scheme going on here I think would be greatly
24 mistaken. I think there was a confluence of circumstances.
25 The initial assault, my client was not involved in. I don't

1 know if, at least from what I got, that she directed anybody
2 to do that. So I'm just not clear on where the State believes
3 that this control came from.

4 My client does have her issues, and she did participate
5 in things that she should not have and probably exposed her
6 children to some things she should not have, but that doesn't
7 mean she didn't care about them. And on this early morning,
8 what happened -- well, let me point out to the Court,
9 initially, my client was charged with -- as an accessory after
10 the fact to the initial assault. I believe it was always a
11 close call regarding her as accessory or the murder charge,
12 but understanding "hand of one, hand of all" --

13 THE COURT: Your position is that she was there when --

14 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Absolutely. She was. She was there.

15 And very shortly after what happened, she took steps to
16 move and hide the body.

17 I would submit to the Court that Payton, her youngest
18 child, her baby, who was involved in this, as you are well
19 aware, she's faced with a decision -- she's in a decision
20 where this has occurred and much of what she did I think was
21 in an effort to try and protect him and try to shield him from
22 what had occurred.

23 She made several ill-advised decisions; moving the body,
24 primarily. And, unfortunately, she got her daughter involved
25 in that as well. But I believe her daughter also did what she

1 did in an effort to protect Payton and try to protect him.
2 Ill advised, not right, not proper, and not legal. And she's
3 here today to accept responsibility for what she did.

4 And I agree with Payton's counsel that this was probably
5 a plea for a long time -- for quite a while. There was some
6 confusion about plea offers and that sort of thing, but my
7 client made it clear to me some time ago that she wanted to
8 plea, but she was actually wanting to get some consideration
9 for her son and her daughter in all of this, because she
10 does -- did feel a responsibility about getting all that
11 going.

12 Your Honor, I'm here today -- me, as her attorney, I'm
13 asking for as much mercy and leniency as you can provide her
14 in this situation. The State had offered her 35 years back
15 six months after this incident occurred.

16 THE COURT: Say that -- say that again. Say that again.

17 MR. GRAUSTEIN: 35 years was offered to her about six
18 months after she was initially arrested. Of course much of
19 the evidence hadn't come in at that point and there was a lot
20 of question about -- and witnesses weren't -- weren't out
21 there yet.

22 But she sought to protect her son and she is seeking now
23 to protect her son or her sons as much as she can -- and her
24 daughter -- and she is asking the Court to provide leniency to
25 her children, who have yet to plea. She's asking that

1 Amber, who has a young child, that she get a sentence that
2 does not involve prison time for her involvement,
3 understanding my client is actually the one who brought her in
4 at that point.

5 She's also asking for as much leniency as the Court can
6 allow for her older son, Jonathan, who I believe is supposed
7 to plea later on today.

8 Your Honor, taking all that into consideration, that
9 she's pleading under the "hand of one, hand of all" and that
10 she's not accused of actually causing any -- actually
11 inflicting any of the injuries, but she's a mother who is
12 faced with her youngest child being in an extreme
13 circumstance, and she took ill-advised action and
14 inappropriate action. And I just ask that you show her as
15 much mercy but especially show as much mercy as you can to her
16 children.

17 MR. LANIER: Your Honor, if I may just briefly.

18 Your Honor, we have watched all the surveillance footage
19 that, remarkably enough, the victim in this case --
20 [microphone distortion]. Remarkably in this case, the victim,
21 Adam Soles is the one who sold her the surveillance and
22 installed it for her. So, in effect, he solved his own
23 murder.

24 But the point is, we have watched all that surveillance
25 footage, and for defense counsel to get up here and pretend

1 that she's just covering for her son, that she did something
2 and she wasn't present for it, Your Honor --

3 THE COURT: I think he did indicate that she was there.

4 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes. Absolutely, Your Honor.

5 MR. LANIER: She was there before he was there. She was
6 in that shed before Payton came into that shed and then he ran
7 out to get a weapon and came back. And now she's still trying
8 to push it off onto him. Your Honor, I think that's not
9 right. She's pleading to murder. She's admitted to murder.
10 And for her to -- for them to kind of do the
11 accessory-after-the-fact thing, Your Honor, I think it's
12 inappropriate.

13 THE COURT: Glad to hear from the defense.

14 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Your Honor, I'm not trying to put
15 anything off onto any other co-defendant. My client is here,
16 accepts responsibility for her conduct, and is not making any
17 excuses for it.

18 Your Honor, my client would like to address the Court at
19 the appropriate time.

20 THE COURT: Certainly.

21 THE DEFENDANT: Your Honor, I'm sorry, and I apologize to
22 the whole Soles family. And it wasn't supposed to be that way
23 and he wasn't -- from what I know, he wasn't supposed to die.

24 Your Honor, I really -- I want the best that you can do
25 for my children, please. And I'm not a bad person. I'm not.

1 And I did not -- it's not like he's saying. It's really not.

2 But I apologize. Thank you. And I'm really sorry to the
3 Soles family, and I'm sorry to my children.

4 RULING OF THE COURT

5 THE COURT: Ms. Watts, I'm taking into consideration the
6 fact that you're 42 years old, and under the circumstances of
7 the plea, you'll serve this sentence day-for-day. I have
8 taken into consideration the circumstances of the crime, and
9 one of the things that -- one of the most difficult things as
10 a judge is to sentence people who have committed crimes, and
11 one of the things that we're always called upon to do is to
12 discern between the wicked and the wayward.

13 And given the fact that you have put your son in this
14 circumstance, in a drug-dealing enterprise, the fact that you
15 were there and participated in that, and probably one thing
16 that sticks out in my mind, anybody who's ever broken a bone
17 -- and I've broken more than one -- it's a very, very painful
18 thing.

19 Can you imagine what it would be like to have your leg
20 broken, one of the biggest bones in your body, and sit there
21 for 11 hours? That's tortious. And I'm taking that into
22 consideration as well.

23 And given what you -- the situation you put your son in
24 and the particular circumstances of this crime, I would
25 probably take the position that you, on the spectrum between

1 wicked and wayward, would lean towards the wicked.

2 And the sentence of the Court is that you be committed to
3 the State Department of Corrections for a period of 45 years,
4 and you're given credit for the time served.

5 And how much is that?

6 MR. GRAUSTEIN: 914 days, Your Honor.

7 THE COURT: 914 days.

8 Good luck to you.

9 (The proceedings concluded at 3:04 p.m.)

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Certificate of Court Reporter

CASE NAME: State v. Samantha Watts (Plea)

DATE OF HEARING: 7/14/25

I, Bobbi Fisher, do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and correct record of the above-captioned proceedings to the best of my ability; and that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this case; and I have no interest, financial or otherwise, in its outcome.

Bobbi Fisher

/s/ Bobbi Fisher_____

Bobbi Fisher, RPR, Official Court Reporter III

Date Prepared: 8/5/25

NOTE: PURSUANT TO RULE 607(h)(1)(B), SCACR, "A COURT REPORTER SHALL RECEIVE THE FEE OF \$1.00 PER PAGE FOR FURNISHING A COPY OF A PREVIOUSLY PREPARED TRANSCRIPT." ALL REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT (FORM 800) FROM OPPOSING PARTY OR NON-PARTIES MUST BE SENT TO THIS REPORTER AT BFISHER@SCCOURTS.ORG.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA * GENERAL SESSIONS
 COUNTY OF HORRY * TRANSCRIPT OF RECORD

-----X
 STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA *
 *
 vs. * Case No. 2023-GS-26-01661,
 * 2023-GS-26-01662
 SAMANTHA GWEN WATTS, *
 *
 Defendant. *
 -----X

July 17, 2025

MOTION TO RECONSIDER SENTENCING

B E F O R E:

The Honorable Michael Nettles, Presiding Judge;
 The Honorable Eugene Warr (observing judge)

A P P E A R A N C E S:

Nancy Livesay, Esq.
 Brandon Lanier, Esq.
 Assistant Solicitors for the State

Scott Graustein, Esq.
 Attorney for the Defendant

Court Stenographer: Bobbi Fisher, RPR
 SC Official Court Reporter III

I N D E X

DESCRIPTION	PAGE
Proceedings	3

E X H I B I T S

(None.)

P R O C E E D I N G S

(The following proceedings started at 2:47 p.m.):

MR. LANIER: Your Honor, I believe we're going to handle Mr. Graustein's Motion to Reconsider Sentencing.

(Pause in the proceedings. The defendant now present in the courtroom.)

THE COURT: Yes, sir.

MR. LANIER: Good morning, Judge Nettles. Good morning, Judge Warr. If it pleases the Court.

We're here today for the defendant's Motion to Reconsider Sentencing in the matter of State v. Samantha Watts.

THE COURT: Mr. Graustein, you're recognized.

MR. GRAUSTEIN: Thank you, Your Honor. And may it please the Court.

Your Honor, the reason I filed the motion was, during my client's sentencing on Monday, the Court made reference to the length of time the defendant or the victim in this case was at the location of the incident and how long he was there following his initial injuries.

I just want to -- and I don't think I made it clear to the Court, but I wanted the Court to at least be aware that, during that entire time period from the initial assault until I think about an hour before this final incident, the victim's wife was present with a vehicle during that entire time. And then, according to her statements, the -- Mr. Soles did not

1 wish to go to a hospital. She -- that's what she related to
2 the -- to law enforcement during her interviews.

3 So I just wanted the Court to be aware that that was the
4 situation; that the victim had, apparently, according to his
5 wife, who knew about his injuries, had approached him about
6 getting medical attention according to her, he refused it, and
7 decided, apparently, to remain at that location where he
8 remained for a number of hours. And it does not -- and I
9 haven't seen any statement that he was not permitted to leave,
10 by anybody. I just wanted the Court to be aware of that.

11 And with that information, I'd ask the Court if it -- if
12 the fact the Court was left with the impression that my client
13 just left him there. Because there was no interaction between
14 my client and him during that period, that I'm aware of. I
15 just wanted the Court to be aware of that. I'd ask the Court
16 to reconsider, with that information and my client not having
17 any record of any sort, a sentence of 35 years.

18 THE COURT: Yes, sir.

19 MR. LANIER: Your Honor, at the appropriate time,
20 Ms. Christy, the defendant -- or the victim's mom, would like
21 to speak.

22 But I would just like to say in rebuttal, Adam did text
23 his father, "I'm at Samantha's, I need help." And then
24 Samantha took his phone and was -- in an attempt to break it.
25 Courtney Soles took it from her, and Courtney Soles left with

1 her vehicle to go on drug runs for Ms. Watts.

2 So there was no vehicle there for him to leave after a
3 certain point. Ms. Watts made sure that everybody got gone
4 very quickly.

5 And the victim, Adam, wanted to go with his father. You
6 know? He wanted his father to take care of him, possibly take
7 him to the hospital. But I just wanted the Court to know that
8 he had no means at that point.

9 THE COURT: Right. Okay.

10 MR. LANIER: And Ms. Christy would like to speak.

11 THE COURT: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. PRIEST: First off, I'd like to say --

13 THE COURT: And your full name?

14 MS. PRIEST: Christy Priest.

15 THE COURT: Yes, ma'am.

16 MS. PRIEST: I'd like to say this is like a slap in the
17 face to the family. She said she --

18 THE COURT: You need to direct your comments to me.

19 MS. PRIEST: She said she was sorry to the Soles family.
20 She's not sorry. They're sorry they got caught because this
21 ain't the first time. This ain't the first incident they have
22 done.

23 They have beat people before and run them down and
24 brought them back. And people's left -- the neighbors has
25 said they've left bloody all over them.

1 But whether Adam sit there with no means of help, common
2 sense would tell anybody in that condition, get them some
3 help. That's uncalled for. They tortured him. They knew
4 what they were doing. They beat his brains out to where it
5 weren't even an open casket. This is like a movie to me -- a
6 horror movie. I keep waiting to wake up, hoping it's a bad
7 nightmare.

8 The grandkids want to hear his voice and call his phone
9 just to hear the -- his voice. And they'll never see him
10 again.

11 And she's not a good mother. You heard her family.
12 She's evil, corrupt. She shouldn't even see the light of day.

13 If it was left up to me, I want her to have the death
14 sentence. I think that's good enough for her. Taxpayers
15 shouldn't even be paying for her to eat and go to the fine
16 doctors and stuff that we're working and paying for.

17 So if you change her sentence, then please give her more.
18 Don't give her less. Please, I beg you, give her more.

19 THE COURT: Thank you, ma'am.

20 Mr. Graustein, I'm not saying I would ever do this, but
21 there's an academic question. If you ask for a Motion to
22 Reconsider, does that mean I can go up on the sentence?

23 MR. GRAUSTEIN: I believe so, yes, Your Honor. And I
24 have spoken with my client about that and told her.

25 THE COURT: Well, the -- you know, there's a question of

1 fact as to whether or not -- you maintain that the wife was
2 there and could take him to the hospital. The solicitor
3 presented evidence to the contrary.

4 My point was, you know, breaking a bone is a very painful
5 thing, and he was there for 11 hours. And regardless of
6 whether he went to the hospital or not, it's a very painful
7 thing. It accentuates the egregious nature of the acts that
8 took place.

9 But that isn't the reason why I gave her 45 years. It
10 was the pattern of conduct, what she -- she was involved in
11 illegal activity and was sort of a head of this drug
12 enterprise and killed him in a very vicious way, dumped him in
13 the river.

14 That's the reason why I gave her that amount. And to be
15 quite honest with you, if it had not been for plea
16 negotiations, I probably would have given her more.

17 MR. GRAUSTEIN: I understand that, Your Honor. I just --
18 because of comments you made, I wanted to raise the issue, so
19 I don't think it was made clear at her hearing, and I just
20 wanted to raise that.

21 THE COURT: But that isn't the reason why I gave her 45
22 years. It's what she put her children through. And it's just
23 inexcusable.

24 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, Your Honor.

25 THE COURT: And that was the reason for my ruling.

1 And I'll deny your Motion for Reconsideration.

2 MR. GRAUSTEIN: Yes, Your Honor.

3 MR. LANIER: Thank you, Judge.

4 (The above proceedings concluded at 9:48 a.m.)

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Certificate of Court Reporter

CASE NAME: State v. Samantha Watts
(Motion to Reconsider)

DATE OF HEARING: 7/17/25

I, Bobbi Fisher, do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and correct record of the above-captioned proceedings to the best of my ability; and that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this case; and I have no interest, financial or otherwise, in its outcome.



/s/ Bobbi Fisher_____

Bobbi Fisher, RPR, Official Court Reporter III

Date Prepared: 8/5/25

NOTE: PURSUANT TO RULE 607(h)(1)(B), SCACR, "A COURT REPORTER SHALL RECEIVE THE FEE OF \$1.00 PER PAGE FOR FURNISHING A COPY OF A PREVIOUSLY PREPARED TRANSCRIPT." ALL REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT (FORM 800) FROM OPPOSING PARTY OR NON-PARTIES MUST BE SENT TO THIS REPORTER AT BFISHER@SCCOURTS.ORG.

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
COUNTY OF HORRY)
)

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)

-VS-)

SAMANTHA WATTS)

DEFENDANT)
_____)

RULE 203 (B) (iv)
WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF
BASIS FOR APPEAL

RECEIVED

JUL 25 2025

SC Court of Appeals

PERSONALLY appeared before me Scott Graustein, who being duly sworn,
deposes and says :

1. I represented the above named defendant before the Honorable Michael Nettles. Defendant's guilty pleas was qualified on July 10, 2025; Defendant was sentenced on July 14, 2025; Defendant's Motion to Reconsider her sentence was denied on July 17, 2025.
2. Co-defendant of this Defendant was sentenced in a separate sentencing hearing immediately prior to the Defendant being sentenced.
3. The Defendant believes that non-testimonial remarks made during mitigation provided during co-defendant's sentencing hearing improperly influenced the sentencing judge in handing down Defendant's sentence.

FILED
HORRY COUNTY
JUL 21 P 15

Sworn to and Subscribed before me
21 day of July, 2025

RENEE ANDERSON
CLERK OF COURT
Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission expires 02/03/2030

Signature of Attorney for Defendant
SCOTT A. GRAUSTEIN
Print name of Attorney for Defendant

WITNESSES

James I Fogle Horry County Police Department

Sean Wyzara

ARREST WARRANT NUMBER

2023A2610200171

CDR: 0116 16-03-0010, 0020

DOA: 1/20/2023

**ACTION OF GRAND JURY
TRUE BILL**

[Signature]
Foreperson of Grand Jury
Date: MAR 22 2023

VERDICT

Foreperson of Petit Jury
Date:

DOCKET NO 2023GS2601662

The State of South Carolina

County of Horry

Nancy Livesay

23H00383

COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS

March, 2023 TERM

THE STATE

vs.

Samantha Gwen Watts
W/ F
3779 Green Sea Rd
Green Sea, SC 29546
DOB: [REDACTED]
SSN: [REDACTED]

ATTORNEY: Scott A. Graustein

Indictment for

Murder

Jimmy A. Richardson, II, Solicitor

ORIGINAL

FILED
HORRY COUNTY

2023 MAR 23 P 12: 12

RENEE N. ELVIS
CLERK OF COURT
HORRY COUNTY, SC

DATE RECEIVED FROM
GRAND JURY

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA)
)
COUNTY OF HORRY)

INDICTMENT

At a Court of General Sessions, convened on March 22, 2023, the Grand Jurors of Horry County present upon their oath:

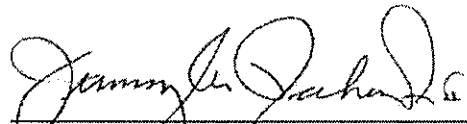
MURDER

CDR: 0116 16-03-0010,0020

That Samantha Gwen Watts did in Horry County, on or about January 9, 2023, willfully, feloniously, and intentionally kill the victim, Cory Adam Soles, with malice aforethought, either express or implied, by means of aiding and abetting the co-defendant, and the victim did die as a proximate result thereof on or about January 9, 2023 in Horry County, in violation of Section 16-03-0010, S. C. Code of Laws, 1976, as amended.

Against the peace and dignity of the State, and contrary to the statute in such case made and provided.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32



JIMMY A. RICHARDSON, II
FIFTEENTH CIRCUIT SOLICITOR

STATE OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF HORRY

SENTENCE ORDER

IN THE COURT OF GENERAL SESSIONS

- V) INDICTMENT/CASE#: 2023GS2601662
-) AWF#: 2023A2610200171
-) Date of Offense: 01/08/2023
-) S.C Code§: 16-03-0010, 0020
-) CDR Code #: 0116
-) Range of Offense: Murder (Death, Life, or NLT 30 years to Life)

STATE vs.

Samantha Gwen Watts

AKA: Samantha Watts

SSN: [REDACTED]

RACE: W

SEX: F

DOB: [REDACTED] 1982

In disposition of the above indictment comes now the Defendant who was CONVICTED OF or PLEADS

Range of Offense Pled: (Death, Life, or NLT 30 years to Life)

TO: Murder

In violation of § 16-03-0010 of the S.C. Code of Laws, bearing CDR Code # 0116

- NON-VIOLENT
- VIOLENT
- SERIOUS
- MOST SERIOUS
- MANDATORY GPS
- § 17-25-45 (CSC w/minor 1st or CSC w/minor 3rd)

The charge is: As indicted Lesser Included Offense Defendant Waives Presentment to Grand Jury

The plea is: w/o Rec/Negotiations Negotiated Recommendation

Nancy Livesay, Solicitor SC Bar # 75459-106819

Scott Graustain, Attorney SC Bar # 68532
for Defendant

The Defendant is committed to the SCDC County Detention Center Home Incarceration Program
 for a determinate term of 45 days/months/years/Time Served YOANTE _____ years and/or shall pay a fine
 of \$ _____; provided that upon the service of _____ days/months/years/Time Served and or payment
 of \$ _____ plus costs and assessments as applicable*; balance is suspended with probation for _____ months/years
 and subject to SCDPPPS standard conditions of probation, which are incorporated by reference.

The sentence shall run CONCURRENT or CONSECUTIVE to sentence on: _____

The Defendant is to be given credit for time served pursuant to S.C. Code § 24-13-40 to be calculated and applied by SCDC

914 days/months To include time spent on monitored house arrest prior to trial and sentencing

SPECIAL CONDITIONS:

- PTUP _____
- No Contact with Victim Domestic Violence Intervention Program Hold for Inpatient Treatment
- Sex Offender Registry pursuant to S.C. Code § 23-3-430 SAC/MHC if necessary
- Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect pursuant to S.C. Code § 17-25-135
- Other: _____

RESTITUTION See Separate Order (20% per S.C. Code §24-21-490(B))

§14-1-206 (Assessments 107.5%)
 §14-1-211 (A)(1) Conv. Surcharge) Fine/Costs and Assessments are to be paid to the Clerk
 §14-1-211 (A)(2)(DUI Surcharge) of Court within \$25.00 days/months/

beginning 8-14-2010

§56-5-1995 (DUI Assessment)	\$100	\$ <u>100.00</u>
§56-1-286 (DUI Breath Test)	\$100	\$ _____
§14-1-212 (Law Enforcement Funding)	\$12	\$ _____
§14-1-213 (Drug Court Surcharge)	\$25	\$ _____
§34-11-70(b)and(c), and 34-11-90(c)and(d) (Admin Fraud Check Court Costs)	\$25	\$ <u>25.00</u>
§50-21-114 (BUI Breath Test Fee)	\$150	\$ _____
§56-5-2942(J) (Vehicle Assessment)	\$41	\$ _____
3% to County (if paid in installments)	\$50	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Appointed PD or appointed other counsel. Provisio requires \$500 to be paid to Clerk during probation and shall be collected before any other fees	\$40/ea	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> §17-3-45(B) Unpaid Application Fee to be paid to the Public Defender Fund	TBD	\$ <u>3.75</u>
	\$500	\$ _____
	\$40	\$ <u>40.00</u>
	TOTAL	\$ <u>108.75</u>

Renee Elvis

Clerk of Court/Deputy Clerk

Bobbi Fisher

Court Reporter

2140
Judge Code

7-14-25
Sentence Date

Michael Miller
Presiding Judge

SCCA217B
01/27/2025

Plea taken 7-10-25
Michael Miller

CERTIFICATE OF COUNSEL FOR APPELLANT

Counsel for appellant certifies that this Record on Appeal contains all material proposed to be included by any of the parties and not any other material and that this Record on Appeal complies to the best of my ability with the April 15, 2014 order from the South Carolina Supreme Court entitled "Revised Order Concerning Personal Identifying Information and Other Sensitive Information in Appellate Court Filings."

Respectfully Submitted,

RECEIVED
Jan 09 2026
SC Court of Appeals


Sarah E. Shipe
Appellate Defender

South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense
Division of Appellate Defense
PO Box 11589
Columbia, SC 29211-1589

ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

This 9th day of January, 2026.