

Roberts' death sentence, conviction to stand



A federal judge on Tuesday, Aug. 15, 2023, denied death row inmate Donna Roberts' bid to overturn her conviction and death sentence for the 2001 slaying of her former husband Robert Fingerhut in Howland Township.

Roberts had filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus in the U.S. Northern Ohio District Court on Dec. 20, 2021, asserting fifteen grounds for relief. She later withdrew two of the grounds.

Judge Dan Polster, in reviewing each of the grounds, decided that none of them had any merit. The judge released his decision in a 120-page opinion

"In assessing the merits of Roberts' complaint, Judge Polster did a thorough job of analyzing each of the issues raised by the defense. We are pleased that he found no merit to any of the issues Roberts defense team raised, and the conviction and death sentence will stand," said Trumbull County Assistant Prosecutor Chuck Morrow after reviewing the documents.

In 2003, Roberts, now age 79, was convicted by a jury of two aggravated murder charges with death penalty specifications plus separate charges of aggravated robbery and aggravated burglary with gun specifications. She was convicted of plotting and assisting her lover Nathaniel Jackson with the murder of her former husband Robert Fingerhut at his Fonderlac Drive home in December 2001 and collect his more than \$500,000 life insurance proceeds. Evidence of the conspiracy was obtained by authorities through 18 jail phone calls and nearly 300 letters exchanged between Roberts and Jackson while he was in prison. Jackson was released from prison a few days before Fingerhut's murder.

First Assistant Christopher Becker led the successful prosecution at that Roberts trial.

After a series of appeals, the Ohio Supreme Court remanded Roberts case back to the trial court for resentencing because of procedural errors. The resentencing hearing took place on October 29, 2007, at which the trial court reimposed the death penalty.

On May 7, 2013, the Ohio Supreme Court vacated Roberts' death sentence again because the trial court failed to consider the defendant's allocution. With a different judge presiding, the trial court again imposed Roberts' death sentence on April 30, 2014.

Roberts remains incarcerated in the Ohio Reformatory for Women in Marysville.

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