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Orange County Superior Court Judge Sentenced to Thirty-Five Years to Life for Murdering His Wife During Drunken Argument over Money

SANTA ANA, Calif. – An Orange County Superior Court judge has been sentenced to 35 years to life for shooting his 65-year-old wife to death in their Anaheim Hills home in August 2023 after a drunken argument over money.

Instead of rendering aid to his wife, Sheryl, after shooting her as they sat in their living room watching television, Judge Jeffrey Ferguson, then 72, went outside and texted his court bailiff and clerk, “I just lost it. I just shot my wife. I won’t be in tomorrow. I will be in custody. I’m so sorry.”

The couple’s 22-year-old son, who tackled his father to wrestle the gun away from him after the shooting, was left inside performing CPR on his mother while being directed by emergency dispatchers.

Jurors rejected Ferguson’s testimony that he accidentally shot his wife and convicted him in April 2025 of one felony count of murder and one felony enhancement of personal use of a firearm and one felony enhancement of discharge of a firearm causing great bodily injury and death.

Ferguson was arrested on Thursday, August 3, 2023, by the Anaheim Police Department after his adult son called 911 shortly after 8 p.m. to report his mother had been shot after she told his father “Why don’t you point a real gun at me?” Ferguson had also simulated pointing a gun at his wife of 27 years using his fingers during an argument at dinner with his wife and son at a nearby Mexican restaurant shortly before the murder.

Ferguson was released from custody by the Orange County Sheriff’s Department the next day after posting the court’s adopted bail schedule of \$1 million. In September 2024, Ferguson had his bail revoked and was taken back into custody after his court-ordered alcohol monitor reported that he had consumed alcohol in violation of the terms of his release and a judge determined that he had lied about his unlawful consumption of alcohol. He was subsequently released after posting a \$2 million bond.

Ferguson has served as an Orange County Superior Court Judge since 2015. Prior to being elected to the Orange County Superior Court, he served as a prosecutor in the Orange County District Attorney’s Office beginning in 1983.

Immediately upon being notified that a former employee of the Orange County District Attorney's Office had been arrested on suspicion of murder in Orange County, the District Attorney's Office contacted the California Attorney General's Office to request a conflict check. After a thorough review of the situation, the Attorney General's Office on Tuesday, August 8, declared the Orange County District Attorney's Office does not have a conflict and could prosecute the case.

Police recovered 48 weapons – including rifles, shotguns, and handguns, and more than 26,000 rounds of ammunition – from his home during the execution of a search warrant.

“This was not an accident; it was murder. Lady Justice is blindfolded, impervious of any attempts to sway her judgement in favor of someone who once held the position of immense trust as a judge and held the fate of the accused in his own hands. While we mourn the tragic loss of Sheryl at the hands of her own husband, we also grieve the tarnish this crime has brought to the judiciary and to the legal profession as a whole by someone who went from wielding the sword of justice to committing the ultimate act of evil.”

Senior Deputy District Attorneys Seton Hunt and Casey Cunningham prosecuted this case.

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