

**News Release from
The Honorable Sandra Doorley
Monroe County District Attorney**

April 7, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**Jury Finds Walter Balkum Jr. Guilty of Manslaughter in the 1st Degree for
the Homicide of Melikah Bruner**

Rochester, NY- On Monday, April 7, 2025, a Monroe County jury convicted 49-year-old Walter Balkum Jr. of Manslaughter in the 1st Degree and Aggravated Criminal Contempt for killing Melikah Bruner on August 27, 2024. He was also convicted by the same jury of two counts of Assault in the 2nd Degree.

On June 2, 2024, Rochester Police Officers responded to a call for service at the home of Melikah Bruner. Upon their arrival, officers spoke to Melikah and her son, both of whom had been assaulted with a knife by the victim's boyfriend, Walter Balkum, Jr. The defendant was arrested and charged with Assault in the 2nd Degree, one count for Melikah Bruner and one count for her adult son. He was released on electronic monitoring and orders of protection were issued. On August 22, 2024, the court released him to pre-trial services without electronic monitoring.

On the night of August 27, 2024, Melikah Bruner's 9-year-old daughter called 911 from their home on Hazelwood Terrace to report that her mother was being attacked by the defendant. When Rochester Police Officers arrived at the residence, they found 43-year-old Melikah Bruner deceased. After a thorough investigation, Rochester Police Officers determined that Walter Balkum, Jr. had beaten Melikah repeatedly, causing her death in front of her child. He was subsequently arrested for the homicide and indicted on Manslaughter in the 1st Degree and Aggravated Criminal Contempt.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Kaylee Rizzari, of the Special Victims Unit.

"This case exemplifies domestic violence in its most brutal form," said Assistant District Attorney Kaylee Rizzari. "It serves as a harrowing reminder of how quickly intimate partner violence can escalate in the blink of an eye. Because of the defendant's appalling actions, Melikah Bruner is dead, her young child is left traumatized, and her numerous friends and family, including her other children, are now forced to navigate a world where their loved one was taken in an atrocious manner. I want to thank the Rochester Police Department for their detailed investigation. I also commend the remarkable strength of Melikah's daughter, who has shown resilience in the face of tragedy. I sincerely hope that Melikah Bruner will not be remembered by her death, but by the life she lived and the lasting impact she made on those she loved."

“At the time of this horrific homicide, Walter Balkum, Jr. was already a four-time convicted felony offender,” said District Attorney Sandra Doorley. “The defendant has consistently demonstrated violent and aggressive behavior, causing immense suffering time and time again, ultimately resulting in the death of them woman he was supposed to love. Walter Balkum, Jr. represents and clear and present danger to our community. It is the hope of the Monroe County District Attorney’s Office that the family of Melikah Bruner, especially her children, can find a sense of justice in today’s verdict. If you or someone you know feels trapped in a domestic violence situation, do not hesitate -- contact 911 or the Willow Domestic Violence Hotline, at (585) 222-SAFE (7233) immediately.”

Walter Balkum, Jr. will be sentenced on May 21, 2025, in front of New York State Supreme Court Justice Renzi.

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