



Questions Surround Trip Taken by Judge, Lawyers, Women

In wake of Leigh Terry's death, Judge Casey Moreland defends conduct in and out of court

BY STEVE CAVENDISH, WALTER ROCHE — JAN 31, 2017 4 PM

By the time Metro police showed up at The Stahlman building on May 25, 2016, one of the building custodians had already been in Unit 907 to check out the smell. A complaint from a next-door neighbor about a strong odor led him inside.

What he found was the body of Leigh Terry, 34, dead from a gunshot wound to her right temple. Police would later conclude that she died May 5, based on when she was last seen as well as her cellphone records. They also reasoned, based on her internet search history, which included details about the death of Marilyn Monroe, that Terry had committed suicide.

The weekend before, Terry and two other women had been the guests of some well-known (and married) members of the Nashville legal community at a condo on Dauphin Island, Ala.: Bryan Lewis, his law partner Larry Hayes and Judge Casey Moreland. Terry, though, was sent home early from the trip after arguing with Lewis. She returned to Nashville — to an apartment leased for her by Lewis, who police files say was listed as her boyfriend and emergency contact on The Stahlman's paperwork — and would eventually be found dead on her bed. A gun, which Lewis lent to Terry for her protection, was in her right hand.

The death, the trip and threats Terry had made about exposing the relationship between the judge and Lewis are spelled out in great detail in an investigative report into the woman's death by the Metro police department.

The trip to the Gulf Coast did not get off to a good start. Terry, the daughter of prominent Nashville surgeon Richard Terry, at first refused to go, but changed her mind following a conversation with Moreland's friend Natalie Amos. Terry, according to the police reports, had gotten into an argument with Lewis over a withdrawal she had made from his bank account.

Lewis told police, "Leigh acted crazy and cursed people on the trip."

According to the reports, Terry argued with Lewis on the flight down, and by the time they reached Alabama, he had decided she was going home. At dinner, according to Amos' police interview, Terry said that "she would ruin [Lewis]," something she reiterated later in texts to him, when she claimed she would "expose their relationship, Natalie's and Casey's."



Moreland tells the *Scene* that he had met Terry only a few times. Moreland was not on the plane — he and Hayes drove separately and joined up with Lewis and the two women when the plane landed. (He would later return to Nashville on Lewis' private plane.)

Lewis and Amos — the latter a former DUI defendant who appeared in Moreland's court in 2014 — took Terry to the Homewood Suites hotel in Mobile. Lewis paid for her room and threw several \$100 bills to her, and he and Amos left, according to the report, which included a written account from the hotel clerk on duty when Terry was checked in.

Lewis would later tell police he did not believe Terry's threats were serious. He also described Terry in one interview with police as “a friend with benefits.”

Terry contacted a friend in Nashville, Brian Pesterfield, who flew down in his private plane, picked her up and brought her back to Nashville. Pesterfield told police that Terry said she “got out of a DUI by sleeping with Judge Casey Moreland.” The *Scene* could not independently verify whether the charge was true.

When asked if he had ever had sex with Terry, Moreland says, “I fully reject and deny any personal relationship with Leigh Terry whatsoever.”

There is some disagreement over the origin of the trip. Moreland tells the *Scene* that he thought it was supposed to be a fishing trip with Lewis and other guys and didn't realize the women would be coming. Amos told police in an interview that she and Moreland “originally started the discussion about having the Alabama trip” and that she didn't realize “other people were going to come on the trip.”

Moreland denies he and Amos were there together.

“It wasn't a weekend for me and her. That might have been her plan or Leigh Terry's plan,” Moreland tells the *Scene*. “I never had an inappropriate relationship with Natalie Amos.”

Attempts to reach Lewis and Amos were unsuccessful.

When asked about Terry's and Amos' appearances in his court, Moreland is adamant that he recused himself from their cases.

“Because I had even a minimal acquaintance with both Ms. Terry and Ms. Amos, when their cases were assigned to my court — as a result of a process that is entirely random — I took the proper step of recusal to ensure the matters were handled in other General Sessions Courts,” Moreland says to the *Scene* in a separate statement. “At no time did I

intervene on their behalf during or after judgments were rendered by the appropriate courts. There are questions from the media about my stamp and signature on case dispositions following successful completion of ordered probation — in both cases my sign off [is] administrative in nature.”

On Terry’s DUI charges, the General Sessions Court disposition form is signed by Judge John Aaron Holt and marked with a stamp from Moreland. But on at least two of Amos’ disposition forms from May 14, 2014, the signature line carries Judge Moreland’s trademark capital “C” signoff.

This was not the first trip that Moreland and Lewis had taken — the pair went to Costa Rica together in 2013, according to images on Moreland’s Facebook page. But it’s their relationship in and out of the courtroom that has drawn scrutiny.

Lewis is scheduled for a three-day hearing beginning Feb. 13 before the state Board of Professional Responsibility on charges that he improperly sought and got Moreland’s assistance in gaining the early release of developer David Chase from a mandatory 12-hour hold. Chase had been arrested on suspicion of domestic violence.

The official complaint charges that Lewis attempted to influence a judge by improper means, had an ex parte contact with the judge and assisted the judge in the violation of the code of judicial conduct. The complaint notes that Moreland was publicly reprimanded for his actions in releasing Chase before the mandatory 12-hour hold.

The Metro Nashville Police Department would not confirm or deny whether they had forwarded Terry’s allegation to the TBI, FBI or the Board of Judicial Conduct. In similar cases, MNPD spokesman Don Aaron says, the department has shared information from investigations with other agencies. He also says the department never directly asked Moreland if he had sex with Terry.

The primary investigation for the police department was the death of Leigh Terry,” Aaron says. “There are other issues, obviously, that are documented in the file, that the Nashville police department has not investigated.”

Terry's decomposing body was brought from her apartment on May 25 to the state medical examiner's office, which would eventually concur in the suicide finding. In September, MNPD received a bloodstain analysis from the crime lab, which concluded that the evidence did not suggest “anyone else was present in close proximity of the victim when the shot was fired.”

Metro police officially ruled the death a suicide and closed the case on Oct. 31.



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