



PRESS RELEASE

Defendant Sentenced to 55 Years for Aggravated Robbery

January 17, 2019

Bryan, TX – On January 16, 2019, Justin Denard Hemphill, 29, of Bryan, was convicted by a jury of aggravated robbery in the 361st District Court. He was subsequently sentenced to 55 years in prison by Judge Steve Smith after a contested hearing to decide Hemphill’s punishment.

On the morning of March 16, 2017, officers with the Bryan Police Department were dispatched to a robbery in progress at the Bryan Drive-In, a convenience store located in the 1500 block of Groesbeck Street.

Although Hemphill had fled the scene by the time officers arrived, his image was caught on store surveillance cameras as he pulled a gun on the owner who was behind the counter and demanded cash. Hemphill wore a dark hoodie and gloves but did not conceal his face. According to the store owner, Hemphill said “give me all the money or I’ll kill you.” After the store owner handed over all the cash and coins in the register, Hemphill ordered his victim to the ground, threatened him again, and ran from the scene. The store owner then called 911.

In an effort to identify the robber, still photos taken from the surveillance video at the store were relayed to local media and to law enforcement personnel within the Bryan Police Department. Tips began to come in from both the public and police officers. One officer with the Bryan Police Department remembered contacting Hemphill in an unrelated incident prior to the robbery and identified Hemphill as the man seen on the surveillance video. Additionally, two members of Hemphill’s family also identified him as the person who committed the robbery. A neighboring business owner also identified Hemphill as an individual who frequented the area and with whom she had a strange encounter in her shop the day before the robbery.





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During the punishment phase, the trial judge heard about Hemphill's criminal history. In 2009, Hemphill was convicted of Indecency With a Child and sentenced to probation. Hemphill's probation officer testified that Hemphill did poorly on probation, eventually leading to revocation and a 5-year prison sentence. After Hemphill got out of prison for that offense, he received three convictions for Failure to Identify, Criminal Mischief, and Resisting Arrest.

The court also heard evidence that in the months leading up to the robbery, Hemphill had assaulted his girlfriend on one occasion and tried to break into her apartment on another.

A detention officer at the Brazos County Jail testified about major disciplinary violations committed by Hemphill during his time in jail awaiting trial. The detention officer testified that Hemphill received sanctions in the jail for fighting on two separate occasions and in another incident he was sanctioned for inciting a fight in the jail.

The victim of the aggravated robbery testified in the punishment phase as well. While attempting to hold back tears, he explained to the judge that he has not felt safe since the robbery in 2017.

During the defense's punishment case, Hemphill himself testified. During his testimony Hemphill denied that he committed the aggravated robbery and showed no remorse for his conduct. He also denied the information that was provided by the other punishment witnesses and testified that everyone else was lying.

