

ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

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Prosecutor

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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MAYS LANDING— A New York woman charged with felony murder, aggravated manslaughter and robbery in connection with the Jan. 25 death of a New York man found dead at the Rodeway Inn on Pacific Avenue in Atlantic City, appeared in court today where she was formally advised of her rights and the charges against her, Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel announced.

Ericka D. Pugh, 26, went to a hotel room with Victor Castillo, 27, of College Point, where she and Anwar Belton, 29, of Jersey City, allegedly robbed and strangled him. Pugh was arrested on Feb. 4 and charged with aggravated assault and endangering an injured person. Pugh remained in custody in New York pending extradition proceedings. Upon her return to New Jersey on Monday, the increased charges of felony murder and aggravated manslaughter were lodged against her, according to Assistant Prosecutor William Merz, who handled the State's case.

During Pugh's initial appearance today Superior Court Judge Michael A. Donio asked if Pugh wanted the charges read, Merz said

Pugh said she did and the Judge read the charges.

Superior Court Judge James E. Isman increased Pugh's bail yesterday from \$150,000 full cash to \$1 million full cash bail to reflect the charges of felony murder and aggravated manslaughter, Merz stated.

Belton had his first appearance on Feb. 17 on felony murder, aggravated manslaughter and robbery charges. He remains in the Atlantic County Justice Facility in lieu of \$1 million full cash bail.

Felony murder is a first-degree crime. If convicted, the individual could face life in prison and a \$200,000 fine. Aggravated manslaughter is a first-degree crime that carries a prison term of up to 30 years, while robbery carries a term of up to 20 years. The charges are all subject to the No Early Release Act, which requires a defendant to serve 85 percent of a prison term before being eligible for parole.

*****These charges are merely an accusation and not proof of guilt. In all criminal cases, a charged defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.**

Anyone with information involving serious crimes is asked to call the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office at 609-909-7800 or go to the Prosecutor's Office Web site at <http://www.acpo.org/tips.html> and provide information by filling out the form anonymously on the Submit a Tip page. People can also call Crime Stoppers at 609-652-1234 or 1-800-658-8477 (TIPS) or visit the Crime Stoppers Website at <http://www.crimestoppersatlantic.com/>. Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards for information leading to the arrest and indictment of those who commit crimes in Atlantic County.