

**IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF LAKE COUNTY, TENNESSEE
FOR THE TWENTY-NINTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

STATE OF TENNESSEE

v.

**AUSTIN DRUMMOND,
Defendant.**

Docket No. 25-CR-11185

MOTION FOR CHANGE OF VENUE

COMES NOW Defendant Austin Drummond, by and through counsel, and respectfully moves this Court for a change of venue pursuant to Tennessee law. Mr. Drummond is charged with four counts of capital murder in Lake County, Tennessee. Because an impartial jury cannot be seated in Lake County due to the small population and pervasive pretrial publicity—local, national, international, and pervasive social media coverage—transfer is necessary to protect Mr. Drummond’s constitutional rights to a fair and impartial jury and due process. In support, Defendant states as follows:

INTRODUCTION

A transfer of venue to a county with a sufficiently large and untainted jury pool to ensure an impartial jury in a capital case. The combination of Lake County’s small population and saturation coverage across traditional media and social platforms renders it impossible to seat an unbiased jury here.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

1. Mr. Drummond is charged with four counts of capital murder. The State has noticed its intent to seek the death penalty.

Lake County Circuit Court
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Circuit Court Clerk

2. Community size and interrelationships: Lake County is among the least populous counties in Tennessee, such that “everybody knows everybody.” In a death-eligible case involving multiple victims, a significant portion of the venire is likely to have personal familiarity or connections with the victims, the Defendant, witnesses, law enforcement, counsel, or court personnel.

3. Coverage has been extensive in local outlets and has also reached national and international media. Social media discussion on platforms including Facebook and TikTok has been widespread and persistent, with high engagement, comments, and content sharing related to the case. This reporting and commentary have repeated alleged facts, circulated images and opinions, and at times amplified sensational characterizations of the crimes.

4. Public commentary reflects strong community opinions about guilt and punishment, including death-penalty advocacy, increasing the risk of fixed opinions among prospective jurors and creating a substantial likelihood that voir dire cannot remedy prejudice.

LEGAL STANDARD

A criminal defendant is entitled to a fair trial by an impartial jury under the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and article I, section 9 of the Tennessee Constitution. Tennessee statutes and rules authorize a change of venue to secure an impartial jury when prejudicial pretrial publicity or local conditions make it unlikely that a fair trial can be had in the county of original venue. Tenn. R. Crim. P. 21 Tennessee appellate decisions recognize that where pervasive publicity and community saturation create a substantial likelihood of prejudice, transfer is warranted; and in capital

cases, courts exercise heightened scrutiny to protect the reliability of the verdict and sentencing. *State v. Davidson*, 121 S.W.3d 600, 611 (Tenn. 2003); *State v. Hoover*, 594 S.W.2d 743, 746 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1979)

ARGUMENT

I. Lake County's Small Population and Interconnected Community Make an Impartial Jury Unattainable in a Death-Penalty Prosecution.

The size and composition of the jury pool are critical to the feasibility of empaneling impartial jurors. In sparsely populated counties, the probability that prospective jurors will personally know the parties, victims, witnesses, or law enforcement is significantly higher; the likelihood of exposure to case-related information is likewise higher; and the number of available, qualified jurors who can credibly claim neutrality is materially lower. In capital cases, voir dire is lengthier and more searching, and death-qualification further reduces the pool. These factors, compounded, make it practically impossible to seat an unbiased panel in Lake County for a four-victim capital murder case. Tennessee courts have recognized that where local connections and pretrial exposure pervade a small community, a change of venue is appropriate. *State v. Hoover*, 594 S.W.2d 743, 746 (Tenn. Crim. App. 1979)

II. Extensive Local, National, and International Coverage, Amplified by Social Media, Has Saturated the Venire and Created a Presumption of Prejudice.

Pretrial publicity can be so pervasive and inflammatory that prejudice must be presumed, obviating any claim that voir dire alone can cure it. *State v. Davidson*, 121 S.W.3d 600, 611 (Tenn. 2003). Here, the case has been the subject of local coverage that repeatedly reported alleged facts and developments; national and international reporting that elevated the profile of the case; viral distribution on Facebook and TikTok, including commentary,

reposts, and speculative narratives. Social media algorithms and community networks in a small county magnify exposure and repetition. The volume, tenor, and persistence of this coverage have likely formed and reinforced opinions regarding Mr. Drummond's guilt and appropriate punishment. Tennessee authority supports venue transfer where extensive media coverage threatens the ability to select a fair jury, and in this case, such venue transfer is warranted.

III. Voir Dire Cannot Adequately Cure the Prejudice in This Record; Transfer Is the Only Effective Remedy.

Although voir dire is an important safeguard, it is inadequate where the community is saturated with prejudicial information, the jury pool is small and interrelated, and strong views about punishment are prevalent. In capital cases, jurors' preconceptions about both guilt and the death penalty are especially consequential. Courts applying Tennessee law grant change of venue where the practical ability to seat a neutral jury is compromised notwithstanding careful voir dire. Such change of venue is clearly warranted in the case at bar.

IV. Transfer Will Protect Constitutional Guarantees Without Unfairly Burdening the State.

A change of venue preserves the integrity of the proceedings, protects Mr. Drummond's rights, and promotes public confidence in the verdict and any sentencing determination. The State retains full opportunity to present its case; witnesses can be subpoenaed and accommodated by logistical orders of the Court. Tennessee procedure provides for such transfer when necessary to ensure fairness. It is necessary to transfer venue in this case.

REQUESTED VENUE AND ALTERNATIVE RELIEF

Defendant requests transfer to a Tennessee county with a larger, less-connected venire and demonstrably lower pretrial exposure, such as Shelby County or Davidson County, or to another county the Court deems appropriate after hearing. In the alternative, Defendant requests: - Individual, sequestered voir dire on pretrial publicity and death-penalty attitudes, - Expanded juror questionnaires tailored to exposure and bias, - Juror sequestration during trial, - Gag and decorum orders limiting extrajudicial statements and social media dissemination by trial participants, - Continuance to allow dissipation of publicity, - Any other measures necessary to ensure a fair trial.

CONCLUSION

Given Lake County's small and interconnected population and the extraordinary breadth of media and social media coverage in this capital case, there is a substantial likelihood that an impartial jury cannot be seated here. Defendant respectfully requests that the Court grant this Motion and transfer venue to an appropriate county, and grant such further relief as is just.

Respectfully submitted,
AUSTIN DRUMMOND

By: _____


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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that a copy of the foregoing was served on the District Attorney General for the 29th Judicial District via email and U.S. Mail, postage prepaid to the District Attorney General this 24th day of November, 2025.



Bryan R. Huffman

2. I have reviewed publicly available reports and social-media posts, including, but not limited to, numerous articles in print and online media¹ listed in the attached Exhibits A-N. These reports relate to the charged offenses (four counts of capital murder) and the community reaction in Lake County, Tennessee, and beyond.

3. Based upon my review, the following facts are true to the best of my knowledge and belief:

¹ Articles reviewed include: "Suspect in Tennessee quadruple killing captured after week on the run," ABC News, Aug. 5, 2025 — <https://abcnews.go.com/US/austin-drummond-suspect-tennessee-quadruple-killing-captured/story?id=124377329>; "How the quadruple murder case unfolded," WBBJ-TV, Aug. 27, 2025 — <https://www.wbbjtv.com/2025/08/27/recap-how-the-quadruple-murder-case-unfolded-what-we-know-about-drummond>; "Austin Drummond: New details emerge as quadruple killing suspect arraigned," Newsweek, Aug. 7, 2025 — <https://www.newsweek.com/austin-drummond-new-details-emerge-alleged-killer-arraigned-court-2110300>; "Death penalty sought against convicted felon accused of slaying Tennessee family," New York Post, Aug. 7, 2025 — <https://nypost.com/2025/08/07/us-news/tennessee-seeks-death-penalty-for-austin-drummond-over-quadruple-murders>; "Two arrested as manhunt goes on for Tennessee quadruple murder suspect," The Washington Post, Aug. 3, 2025 — <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2025/08/03/tennessee-quadruple-murder-manhunt>; "Tennessee quadruple murder case: what we know about Austin Drummond," The Independent (UK), Aug. 2025 — <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/crime/tennessee-quadruple-murder-austin-drummond-b2802117.html>; "United States crime: Austin Drummond named as suspect in quadruple murder," 9News (Australia), Aug. 2025 — <https://www.9news.com.au/world/united-states-murder-tennessee/f69d4530-4690-4af9-983c-7c7c3fc62095>; "Authorities seek death penalty for Tennessee murder suspect," CBS News, Aug. 8, 2025 — <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/austin-drummond-tennessee-quadruple-murder-death-penalty>; "Tennessee quadruple homicide suspect captured after manhunt," CNN, Aug. 6, 2025 — <https://www.cnn.com/2025/08/06/us/tennessee-quadruple-homicide-suspect-captured/index.html>; "Man charged in Lake County slayings faces death penalty," The New York Times, Aug. 9, 2025 — <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/09/us/tennessee-austin-drummond-murder-trial.html>; Social-media printouts: Facebook posts by Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (Aug 1, 2025) and TikTok videos under #LakeCountyMurders, #AustinDrummond; Map of investigation locations, WBBJ-TV, Aug. 3, 2025 — <https://www.wbbjtv.com/2025/08/03/map-of-significant-locations-in-quadruple-murder-investigation>.

- a) On or about July 29, 2025, a baby girl approximately seven months of age was discovered abandoned in a car seat on the front lawn of a residence in Tigrett (Dyer County), Tennessee, and shortly thereafter four members of her family were found shot to death in a wooded area of Tiptonville / Lake County, Tennessee.
- b) The victims were identified as Adrianna Williams, James "Matthew" Wilson, Cortney Rose, and Braydon Williams.
- c) The suspect, Austin Drummond, was named by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation as the prime suspect in the quadruple murder and kidnapping.
- d) A multi-agency manhunt unfolded involving the TBI, U.S. Marshals, and local agencies, widely publicized with substantial reward offerings.
- e) The case has received national and international coverage, including West Tennessee news organizations, ABC News, CBS News, CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Independent (UK), and 9News (Australia).
- f) The New York Post and Newsweek articles note that the case 'went viral' on TikTok and Facebook, with hashtags such as #AustinDrummond and #LakeCountyMurders generating hundreds of thousands of views and shares. (New York Post, Aug. 21, 2025, <https://nypost.com/2025/08/21/us-news/alleged-tennessee-killer-austin-drummond-claims-he-was-an-fbi-informant-and-was-framed-for-the-quadruple-murders>)
- g) Lake County is a rural, low-population jurisdiction with a limited jury pool. The official population as of the 2020 Census is 7,005, and as of 2024 is estimated to be approximately 6,422. (https://data.census.gov/profile/Lake_County,_Tennessee?g=050XX00US47095;

<https://lakecountyttn.gov/about>) The likelihood that potential jurors know one another or have been exposed to this publicity is extremely high.

h) In a capital-case context, where jurors must be death-qualified, the combined effects of publicity and community ties make it nearly impossible to select an impartial jury locally.

4. Based on the foregoing, it is my opinion that extensive publicity, widespread community awareness, and pervasive social-media commentary have created an environment of undue excitement and prejudice against the Defendant in Lake County, Tennessee. Voir dire and cautionary instructions will not cure this prejudice, and a fair and impartial jury cannot be seated in this venue.

5. The only realistic method to protect the Defendant's constitutional right to a fair trial is to transfer this case to another county, or to draw a jury venire from outside Lake County.

FURTHER AFFIANT SAYETH NOT.


SHELLEY RAYNOR

Date: 11-14-25

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 14th day of November, 2025.




Notary Public

My commission expires: 5/1/26

