

UPDATED: 1:18 p.m. December 17, 2007  
Mayor's daughter pleads guilty in drug case

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 12/17/07

Greenville, S.C. — A daughter of Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin pleaded guilty today to federal charges that she illegally concealed proceeds from her former husband's transcontinental drug-trafficking ring.

Kai Franklin Graham, 35, the oldest of the mayor's three children, pleaded guilty to structuring financial transactions in a way that avoided scrutiny from federal authorities.

While her former husband, Tremayne Graham, 34, was a fugitive from justice, she converted cash from him into 14 postal money orders totaling \$14,000. She admitted going to seven Atlanta area post offices in a single day to avoid federal financial rules that would require reports of transactions exceeding \$2,000.

Franklin Graham is likely to be sentenced to three months of home confinement and three years of probation. However, if she fails to comply with terms of her plea agreement with federal prosecutors, U.S. District Judge Henry M. Herlong Jr. could increase the sentence to as much as five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Herlong will formally sentence Franklin Graham in 60 to 90 days.

The mayor sat in a federal courtroom in Greenville this morning and watched as her daughter entered the plea. She declined to comment afterward.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Mark Moore said Franklin Graham is expected to cooperate in several aspects of an investigation into her former husband's drug business, which moved at least 2,200 pounds of Mexican cocaine from Los Angeles through Atlanta to South Carolina.

He said authorities will question her about a double homicide in Atlanta linked to the case. One of the victims, Ulysses Hackett III, was a co-defendant of Tremayne Graham's and was thought to be considering an offer to testify against him in exchange for a lenient sentence.

A federal grand jury in South Carolina indicted Tremayne Graham in April 2004 in the drug case, which has resulted in more than a dozen guilty pleas. While he was out of jail on a \$400,000 bond, Hackett and his girlfriend, Misty Denise Carter, were shot to death in her Virginia-Highland townhouse.

Atlanta police never solved the case, but federal prosecutors have alleged Graham ordered the killings.

According to earlier testimony, Graham then told an associate that he had moved into the mayor's house, hoping to signal he feared he, too, would be killed. Soon, he fled to California. From there, authorities allege, he sent couriers with bags of cash to his wife.

Although Franklin Graham pleaded guilty to financial transactions conducted on Nov. 12, 2004, Moore said in court that the government could have proved that she engaged in additional transactions to hide the source of her cash.

Franklin Graham filed for divorce in January 2005.

Authorities captured Graham in June 2005 in California. Prosecutors later alleged he lied about his former wife's role in his drug business — one factor that prompted the judge to impose the maximum sentence against him: life with no chance of parole.