

VARGHESE

SUMMERSETT
INJURY LAW GROUP

Maitlyn Gandy Statement

Good morning, thank you all for being here. My name is Maitlyn Gandy and I'm the mommy of Athena Presley Monroe Strand.

On November 30th, a FedEx delivery man drove onto Athena's father's property to deliver a package of what was supposed to be a Christmas present for our daughter.

This is the package. A package containing "You Can Be Anything" barbies. Athena was robbed of the opportunity to grow up to be anything she wanted. And this present, ordered out of innocence and love, is one she will never receive.

Athena's favorite holiday was Christmas, as it is for many children everywhere. The joy Athena gave her

family and the joy she felt on Christmas, is something we will never feel with her again.

That delivery driver admitted to kidnapping and killing my innocent, free-spirited 7-year-old daughter on Friday, December 2.

At the time of Athena's abduction, she was staying with her stepmother and father in Paradise, Texas, doing what kids do: playing within the bounds of her father's property on the same land he grew up and played on. The same land that for 20 or more years, he, his siblings and all of their friends had been safe.

I was supposed to bring Athena back to our home in Oklahoma after Christmas break. Now, instead, Athena will be cremated and come home in an urn because I am not even close to being ready to let her go.

I will never see her bright blue eyes or her ornery smile again. I will never be able to hear her say "I love you mommy." I will never be able to do her hair again or hold her while she sleeps.

I was robbed of watching her grow up by a man that everyone was supposed to be able to trust to do one simple task: deliver Christmas packages and leave.

Tomorrow will be the last time I will see my baby. After tomorrow, when the silence sets in, Athena's family, including her three young sisters, will start the journey of all the "firsts" without her. Her little sister's 3rd Birthday. Then my 27th Birthday. Our Christmas Eve tradition. The first time in 7 years of not hearing and seeing the excitement of Athena opening gifts from Santa and Sissy.

I ask everyone to hold your littles just a little tighter for me.

I want to take a moment to thank the community for the outpouring of love and support. From the moment she went missing, this community flew into action and they have not stopped. I have felt your prayers, read your messages and letters, and I see your pink. Everywhere.

There are no words to express how thankful I am for the first responders, law enforcement and responding agencies, volunteers, churches, businesses, and all the

others I have failed to list. I am also grateful to the media for helping keeping Athena's story alive.

I want everyone to know Athena. She was an amazing little girl who loved dancing, singing and all animals - dogs, cats, horses, lizards, chinchillas.

She also loved school and all of her friends in the first grade, who are now also struggling with her senseless murder. Athena also loved flowers, but she was also not afraid to get down in the mud with the boys. She was her father's daughter.

I know that Athena's death will not be in vain. I will spend the rest of my life fighting for her so that no other family will endure such unbearable pain and grief. A monster attempted to take Athena's voice. We are her voice.

Screening and hiring policies must be put into place so that monsters wearing delivery uniforms don't show up on our children's doorsteps.

Please help me keep Athena's light shining.

