National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls



Enquête nationale sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Truth-Gathering Process Part I Statement Gathering Pelican Rapids Inn Fort Smith, Northwest Territories



Thursday October 25, 2018

Statement - Volume 607 Jennifer Heron, In relation to Helen Heron

Statement gathered by Frank Hope

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II TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement Volume 607 Witness: Jennifer He	ron
October 25, 2018	PAGE
_	r Heron
Statement Gatherer:	Frank Hope

Documents submitted with testimony: none.

Fort Smith, Northwest Territories 1 --- Upon commencing on Thursday, October 25, 2018 at 4:00 p.m. 2 MR. FRANK HOPE: My name is Frank Hope, 3 statement gatherer. Today is October 25th, 2018. We are in 4 Fort Smith, Pelican Rapids Inn, Room 220. And your name 5 is? 6 7 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Jennifer Heron. MR. FRANK HOPE: Welcome, Jennifer. And I 8 just want to inform that we've reviewed the informed 9 10 consent, and Jennifer will now fill it out. MS. JENNIFER HERON: Okay. Both of them, or 11 just the one's good? 12 13 MR. FRANK HOPE: Both of them, so you can keep one for yourself. If you can give me that first part, 14 I'll sign it for you. 15 16 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Okay. 17 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. And that's yours. MS. JENNIFER HERON: Okay. 18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. Thank you. 19 Okay. And just for the record, the time is 20 21 4:00 p.m. 22 Again, I want to thank you on behalf of the Commissioners for coming in, Jennifer, today. And I 23 understand you're here to speak about your sister, Helen. 24 And what would you like the Commissioners to know? 25

MS. JENNIFER HERON: My sister was a 1 2 23-year-old Métis born and raised here in Fort Smith, and on June the 5th, 19 -- sorry, it's been so long -- June the 3 5th, 1982, on her way home walking from a dance, she was hit 4 5 by a vehicle and her murder was never solved. MR. FRANK HOPE: Tell me more about that. 6 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Helen was a vibrant 7 person. She always worked two jobs. She was just finished 8 working for the government, and she was supposed to start 9 that Monday working at the college. So she would have had 10 11 like 35 years in. She probably would have been a mother and a wife. 12 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 13 14 MS. JENNIFER HERON: And -- yeah, she was taken away at a very young age. She was a loving aunt, a 15 loving sister. 16 17 When she got murdered, I was with her that night just before she passed away. She had come home from 18 a dance and some people had brought her to the house where 19 we were living. Her and I were roommates. And we had 20 phoned -- there was some other friends there. We had 21 phoned the ambulance, and the ambulance never did come pick 22 23 her up or anything, they never did respond to the call. My friends put her in the back of their car, 24 and on the way to the hospital she died. She died because 25

23

her pelvic bone was crushed by the vehicle that hit her.
And all of the cops came around and asked
questions. It just didn't seem that they really pursued it
because it wasn't -- you know, people always talk, and you
know, like it's -- it was supposed to have been like a red
vehicle, and stuff like that.

Fort Smith at that time might have had 2,300
people. You can't tell me there were that many vehicles
that you couldn't go and check. You know, you heard
stories of people washing their vehicles and stuff. So it
just -- to me, it was never really pursued or investigated
properly.

I'm from a family with nine kids, and she 13 14 was the first to leave in our family. She -- you know. And it was hard. It was hard for years. She had left two 15 loving nephews to get -- that she had loved and treated 16 17 like her own. Even though -- I mean, they had their parents but she spoilt them rotten, and these two little 18 boys grew up without their aunt, and we grew up without a 19 20 sister. And my mom and dad lost their daughter, and my mom and dad took it very hard. And every parent says you never 21 should have your children leave before you do. 22

24 MS. JENNIFER HERON: So I just -- yeah, I'm
 25 here today because I want to let people know that, you

MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm.

know, she's not forgotten. It's 35 years, but it still 1 2 hurts. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 3 MS. JENNIFER HERON: It never does stop 4 5 hurting, you know. MR. FRANK HOPE: And to know that someone is 6 7 responsible who is out there, that there has been no justice. 8 MS. JENNIFER HERON: No, there hasn't. 9 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. 10 11 MS. JENNIFER HERON: And another thing too, it's like a small town like this, somebody's living with 12 that guilt. Maybe they've passed away. Maybe it'll never 13 14 be solved. MR. FRANK HOPE: So can you tell me, is this 15 an open case? Do you know if it's an open case, or is 16 there a case? 17 MS. JENNIFER HERON: There is -- it's 18 considered an open case for 99 years. 19 20 MR. FRANK HOPE: And since then -- so just -- let's talk about the RCMP involvement in terms of their 21 involvement, their support, or lack of support. Can you 22 tell me a little more about how that has been since? 23 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Well, I know my sister, 24 25 my older sister, every once in a while, she'll phone and

she'll ask if, you know, is the case still open, have you 1 2 found anything new out. And they just tell her it's still an active case, no new leads. Yeah. 3 MR. FRANK HOPE: Is there a main contact 4 5 person within the RCMP? MS. JENNIFER HERON: I am not quite sure who 6 she phones. I'm not quite sure. She doesn't -- like I've 7 8 never really asked her about it. But my -- I have another sister and she's told me that my sister actively phones and 9 asks if there's any updates, if there's any new 10 11 information. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 12 MS. JENNIFER HERON: M'hm. 13 14 MR. FRANK HOPE: And tell me a little more too about the -- you said that the ambulance was called and 15 it never did show up. Can you ---? 16 17 MS. JENNIFER HERON: It never did show up. My -- there was my sister, myself, and a friend of ours, 18 Marg, we all lived in the same house, a three-bedroom house 19 20 we were renting. I came home after the dance and she was there. And I said, "Oh my gosh, what the heck? She's 21 laying there. You better get her in her room because if 22 23 she gets up, she's going to get mad at us". So they took her upstairs and something 24 didn't seem right. So I went up to see her and she was 25

like moaning and groaning, so I came back downstairs. By 1 2 then everybody had left. And the three of us, we were talking, and we said, "Better phone an ambulance, 3 something's wrong with her. Phone the ambulance". They 4 5 never did show up. Never did. So my friend and Marg, they took her to the hospital, and on the way she died. 6 Yeah. We don't -- like I mean, like moving 7 her around could have contributed to it, but the fact is 8 that someone hit her with a vehicle. Someone hit her hard 9 enough that it crushed her pelvic bone, and she died of 10 11 internal bleeding. MR. FRANK HOPE: And this individual was 12 never arrested or found (indiscernible)? 13 14 MS. JENNIFER HERON: There never was anybody found. Nobody ever was arrested. There was never anybody 15 brought up as suspicious or anything. It was just they 16 17 investigated and that was it. MR. FRANK HOPE: Hmm. 18 MS. JENNIFER HERON: They did interviews. 19 20 They come around and they talked to us, but that was about 21 it. 22 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. What do you think 23 more could have been done by the RCMP? 24 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Like I said, Fort Smith is small. There aren't that many vehicles that were red at 25

that time. They could have went around and checked. They 1 2 could have went and checked every red vehicle in this town. They didn't. 3 We heard stories that, you know, somebody 4 5 went down to the yard and cleaned their vehicle, like the government yard and cleaned their vehicle. We've heard 6 other stories that somebody had went to Fort Chip and -- or 7 8 Fort McMurray, talked to a medicine guy and wanted it out of his mind, and stuff like this. 9 10 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 11 MS. JENNIFER HERON: But no, it just --12 yeah. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 13 14 MS. JENNIFER HERON: And I'm sure you rub shoulders with someone -- you know, every day you could be 15 talking to this person, you could see them. 16 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 17 MS. JENNIFER HERON: And that's the hard 18 part. The hard part is, you know, will this ever be solved 19 and do we want to hear it? What do we want to hear? What 20 do we want to hear after all these years? You know? Maybe 21 it's a brother's best friend for all we know. 22 23 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know, it's a hard 24 25 thing. After 35 years you don't know what to expect or

what to think. You don't even know what you want the 1 2 outcome to be. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So tell me a little 3 more about your sister. You mentioned there was nine of 4 5 you? MS. JENNIFER HERON: There was nine of us. 6 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. So just tell me --7 give the Commissioners a little view of your family of 8 origin, growing up, and those type of things. 9 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Well, our dad came from 10 11 Fort Chip. There were nine kids born here in Fort Smith; five boys, four girls. Helen would have been the fourth 12 youngest, I guess; yeah, the fourth youngest. 13 14 At a young age, she was in Edmonton, she had TB, jaundice, and she was away as a baby. She came home 15 when she was almost 2 years old. She went to school here. 16 17 She graduated from the business college. She worked with Dr. Cass, who everyone knew in town. She always worked at 18 Kaisers. She got in with the government, Parks. Yeah, she 19 -- at a young age, she started working full time, but she 20 always had two jobs. 21 22 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 23 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Loved to dress up, 24 loved clothes. 25 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm.

1	MS. JENNIFER HERON: M'hm.
2	MR. FRANK HOPE: And your parents, what are
3	their names?
4	MS. JENNIFER HERON: Charles and Mabel
5	Heron.
6	MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay.
7	MS. JENNIFER HERON: M'hm.
8	MR. FRANK HOPE: And did they go through
9	residential school?
10	MS. JENNIFER HERON: No. My mother was born
11	in between Fort Chip and Fort Fitzgerald, so she was
12	raised in the bush there
13	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm.
14	MS. JENNIFER HERON: Johnson's Landing.
15	And she was 23 years old when she came to Fort Smith. My
16	father, up I'm not even sure what grade he had in
17	school.
18	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm.
19	MS. JENNIFER HERON: But Helen, she was in
20	residential school.
21	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. Any other siblings?
22	MS. JENNIFER HERON: Three of us weren't in
23	residential school. I was too young, and my brother and
24	sister were too old. My mother had tuberculosis, so she
25	had to go live well she had to go to Edmonton and left

my dad here behind with us. But it was too much for him to 1 2 raise kids, so they all went into the -- what is called Grandin College, or Breynat Hall, sorry. But like I said, 3 I was too young, so my oldest sister had to raise me for a 4 5 year-and-a-half or two years. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 6 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. 7 MR. FRANK HOPE: Any substance abuse growing 8 up in the family? Any ---? 9 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Well, we all drank 10 11 alcohol, but no one did drugs. MR. FRANK HOPE: Your parents? 12 MS. JENNIFER HERON: No. My dad would drink 13 14 occasionally, but my mother never drank at all. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 15 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Never drank at all. 16 17 She didn't even smoke. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So as your sister 18 was going through her education and work, so at the time of 19 20 her death what was -- how was life for her at that time? MS. JENNIFER HERON: She was your typical 21 teenager. You know, went to work, went to school, drank on 22 23 the weekends with her friends. She wasn't into sports. I guess she was more -- she loved her nephews, two nephews, 24 25 Clint and Blaine, she loved them so much. She spoilt them

so bad that -- you know, she would buy them whatever they 1 2 wanted. And she just -- yeah. And there is so many that came after that that never got to know her. I have a niece 3 that looks so much like her ---4 5 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. MS. JENNIFER HERON: --- Charlene. She's 6 got her curly hair and -- no. I -- you always compare and 7 8 wonder. Like you know, I wonder what, I wonder how she would have been. 9 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 10 11 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. MR. FRANK HOPE: Growing up in Fort Smith, 12 how was it for you children growing up here in the 13 14 educational system? Was there racism? Did your family experience racism or any bullying and those type of issues? 15 MS. JENNIFER HERON: No. Fort Smith's kind 16 17 of unique because it was split in almost three. It was like you had your white people living up on that end of 18 town, you had your Métis living in the middle, and you had 19 20 your Natives living in what they called "The Village". But didn't know it. We didn't even know -- I mean, back then 21 they used to call us "Half Breeds". Didn't know what that 22 23 meant. We never -- you know, when you go to school, you're 24 with everybody. Didn't -- never experienced it until 25 probably in later years.

MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 1 2 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. MR. FRANK HOPE: And like you were talking 3 about, Breynat Hall and Grandin College, so there was a lot 4 of other kids from all over the North ---5 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Oh, yeah. 6 MR. FRANK HOPE: --- that came to Fort 7 Smith. How was that? 8 9 MS. JENNIFER HERON: I would say it was a good thing. I ended up marrying a guy from -- that came 10 11 through the schooling system. But -- no, I don't think it was bad because when you look at all the leaders that came 12 out of -- lived in Grandin College. 13 14 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. M'hm. MS. JENNIFER HERON: I can't say that 15 residential school was bad because I wasn't in it, and I 16 17 never heard any horror stories or anything bad about it, not in Fort Smith anyways. 18 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 19 20 MS. JENNIFER HERON: My aunt, she's a nun. She's passed away now. I have nothing but respect for the 21 22 church. 23 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So you come in today to acknowledge what happened to your sister, and like you 24 25 say, it's been about 35 years. So since then, since this

happened, how have you and your siblings and your parents, 1 2 how have they been coping over all those years? MS. JENNIFER HERON: I would say each person 3 had -- it was their own journey. No one's -- of course, no 4 5 one reaches and offers any kind of help. I think each person had to deal with it in their own private way. 6 Because my sisters, we were close, well, 7 still are I quess, weren't able to talk about it. And I 8 haven't talked about it for years until this came up. 9 And I guess it's hard, it was very hard because of the 10 11 circumstances around it. For me, it was personal because, like I 12 said, I was there the night that they brought her home, or 13 14 I came home after they brought her home. And my dad lashed out at me because he said I knew who did it, and things 15 like that. So for me, it was really hard. 16 17 My other brothers and sisters, they weren't -- they lost their sister, but I was kicked out of the 18 house. I was told I was no better who did it because I 19 20 knew who did it. But I didn't. I never knew who did it. I mean, I wouldn't keep something like that -- you know. 21 So yeah, it was hard, it was hard for me. I 22 23 don't like to talk about it because it hurts me. My dad's 24 gone and I don't want my brothers and sisters to think that, you know -- I don't know. I don't know what -- I 25

quess that's why it's hard for me is because of what my dad 1 2 said to me. 3 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. And I can see there's some hurt there. 4 5 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. There is, there is hurt, but because I love my dad and I know he hurt and I 6 don't blame him or I don't -- I still love my dad as much 7 8 as I did back then. But no, it hurt because getting kicked out and told that, you know, you're no better than a 9 murderer, it hurts. 10 11 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. M'hm. MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. Like I don't 12 even know if like a lot of my family knows that that 13 14 happened to me. I don't think they do because I moved out for a couple of days and they went back home. So they 15 probably don't even know that that happened to me. 16 MR. FRANK HOPE: So your father blamed you? 17 MS. JENNIFER HERON: He did. 18 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah? 19 20 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah, he did. He said that I knew who did it and that I was no better than that 21 22 person. 23 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. How did you deal with that? 24 25 MS. JENNIFER HERON: I guess we all have a

coping mechanism, and I've pretty much blocked it out. 1 2 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. 3 MS. JENNIFER HERON: M'hm. MR. FRANK HOPE: But it still hurts? 4 5 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Oh, yeah. M'hm. Yeah. MR. FRANK HOPE: And you mentioned that your 6 other siblings too, that it's rarely talked about. 7 MS. JENNIFER HERON: No, we don't talk about 8 it anymore. After my -- I lost two brothers to cancer, and 9 after they passed away my family kind of just does their 10 11 own thing. We don't have the gatherings, and we never really did talk about our feelings. We never did. No. 12 MR. FRANK HOPE: So what would you like to 13 14 happen in regards to your sister's case? Because as you said it, it is an open case. What would you like to see 15 16 happen? 17 MS. JENNIFER HERON: I would love justice for her, first off. I guess I would like them to, you 18 know, at least acknowledge the fact that, you know, there 19 20 aren't that many open cases in Fort Smith. Why can't they visit a family member and say, you know, "We're well aware 21 that this case is open and we don't have anything to tell 22 23 you". 24 But show a little compassion. You know? Acknowledge the fact that yes, your sister was murdered 25

here in Fort Smith. I mean, we don't have anything to tell 1 2 you, but we're still -- we still have the case open. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. Do you think --3 because I mean, we have so many small communities in the 4 5 North, and you know, you have -- we have really high rates of turnovers with the resources, the police, social 6 services, nurses, doctors. And do you think that could be 7 8 an issue in regards to not having a consistency in regards to your sister's case in regards to the investigation into 9 10 that? 11 MS. JENNIFER HERON: I don't know because at that -- when she passed away, I was only what, 19, 20 years 12 old. So back then, I never really -- the police, them 13

being out and about, there were resources and stuff, it didn't even really matter to me. It didn't. But I don't know, like I said, I would like them to just, you know, acknowledge it.

Now that I'm older, the police are 18 non-existent in this community, so it's like anything can 19 20 happen. I mean, there was just a murder here not too long ago. The ambulance got there before the police. It takes 21 five minutes to get from one end of town to the other, why 22 23 the hell weren't the police there then? That was another 24 murder -- a Native person. You know, what was their 25 attitude? What? Another couple of drunken Indians?

MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 1 2 MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know? You do see it. You see it ---3 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah. 4 5 MS. JENNIFER HERON: --- in these communities. You do. Yeah. You see the cops, they go to 6 the cop station. I mean, it's a totally different subject, 7 but there is a problem, there's a big problem. 8 MR. FRANK HOPE: Yeah, it's all part of the 9 systemic issues we're talking about and dealing with as ---10 11 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Yeah. MR. FRANK HOPE: --- Canadians. 12 MS. JENNIFER HERON: It is. It's like --13 14 like I said, I'm -- I think our population must be about 2,200-2,300 now. Where are the cops? I mean, I know 15 people who have driven home drunk from lounges, homes, and 16 17 things like that, their attitude is cops aren't going to be out. But maybe that was the attitude back then. Where are 18 they? 19 20 MR. FRANK HOPE: It's a good point. MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know, where the 21 22 heck are they, you know? 23 MR. FRANK HOPE: So the attitude then and the attitude now? 24 25 MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know, we've had

1	some really good cops come through Fort Smith, we have. I
2	can't say that they're all bad; there's always some good.
3	There always is ones that are energetic and want to get up
4	and work for us. Because I did work for the RCMP. I will
5	never say that they're all bad.
6	But it just seems to me that we've gotten
7	the worst ones lately. There's just - they're
8	non-existent. You know, I'm sure you get a really good
9	paycheque living in the North, and you get a good Northern
10	allowance, and you get to climb higher because there's
11	you're living in the North. Is that why they're here?
12	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm.
13	MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know, do they
14	really care that that's they're RCMP, they're here to
15	protect us. Where the heck are they?
15 16	protect us. Where the heck are they? MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any
16	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any
16 17	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any other information that you'd like the Commissioners to know
16 17 18	MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any other information that you'd like the Commissioners to know about your sister and the case that you may?
16 17 18 19	<pre>MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any other information that you'd like the Commissioners to know about your sister and the case that you may? MS. JENNIFER HERON: I'd want them to know</pre>
16 17 18 19 20	<pre>MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any other information that you'd like the Commissioners to know about your sister and the case that you may? MS. JENNIFER HERON: I'd want them to know that I lost a dear, loving sister. Like I said, it is</pre>
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16 17 18 19 20 21 22	<pre>MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So is there any other information that you'd like the Commissioners to know about your sister and the case that you may? MS. JENNIFER HERON: I'd want them to know that I lost a dear, loving sister. Like I said, it is 35 years ago, and I'm sure it's not a case that will ever be solved unless somebody pops up and says hey, I did it.</pre>

MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 1 2 MS. JENNIFER HERON: But I just want them to know that even though she was taken from us, she is loved. 3 And I'm sure it's like that with every other case that's 4 5 out there. We want them to know that these people are not forgotten. 6 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 7 MS. JENNIFER HERON: We'll never stop loving 8 9 them. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So two things: what 10 11 recommendations would you like to give, and how would you like your sister's memory -- your sister honoured? 12 MS. JENNIFER HERON: She's honoured in our 13 14 hearts. She's not forgotten. That part is taken care of. As for recommendations, I think that more active police --15 more active. Yeah, show a little compassion. We're 16 17 people. Those are people that died. Whether they were White, Native, or what, show a little compassion. I --18 like my sister wasn't in the trade or anything like that, 19 20 she was a girl walking home after a dance at the Community Centre. She was on her way to go home, she was killed. 21 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. 22 23 MS. JENNIFER HERON: You know? Reach out. 24 Let the family know. You know? Yeah, it was 5 years, 25 10 years, 15 years, like let us know that, you know, if you

heard something you would do something about it. 1 2 MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So you mentioned your older sister has phoned the RCMP in the past for 3 updates that since then -- since your sister was killed, 4 5 the RCMP have not advised the family? MS. JENNIFER HERON: No. No. As far as I 6 7 know, no. 8 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. 9 MS. JENNIFER HERON: My mother has never said that anyone stepped in to -- came to her house. She 10 11 lived in her house right from day one, just up until the year before she died. And not -- no one ever knocked on 12 her door and said, "You know, Mrs. Heron, we're here to 13 14 acknowledge the fact that your daughter, Helen, was killed here in Fort Smith". Never. It was always that someone 15 had to phone them. Yeah. 16 17 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. MS. JENNIFER HERON: And I have lived here 18 most of my life, so I know there are not that many cases 19 20 that would be unsolved. MR. FRANK HOPE: M'hm. So do you feel like 21 22 you'd like to end there? 23 MS. JENNIFER HERON: Sure. 24 MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. Is there any other 25 thing you want to say before we close?

1	MS. JENNIFER HERON: No, other than my heart
2	goes out to everybody who has lost somebody.
3	MR. FRANK HOPE: Okay. Thanks so much.
4	Acknowledge you for coming in today and sharing your story
5	about your sister. Thank you.
6	I just want mark the time at 4:26 p.m.
7	
8	Upon adjourning at 4:26 p.m.
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I, Suzanne Jobb, Court Transcriber, hereby certify that I have transcribed the foregoing and it is a true and accurate transcript of the digital audio provided in this matter.

Suzanne Jabb

Suzanne Jobb January 25, 2019