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July 8, 2021

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**By Electronic Filing Only**

The Honorable Edward J. McBride Jr., P.J. Cr.  
Camden County Justice Complex  
101 South 5th Street  
Camden, NJ 08103

**Re: State v. Taron Hill  
Indictment No. 05-09-3492-I  
State's Response to Defendant's Motion for a New Trial**

Dear Judge McBride:

Please accept this letter brief in lieu of a more formal submission as the State's response to defendant Taron Hill's motion for a new trial pursuant to R. 3:20-1. The State joins in defendant's motion for a new trial and for the reasons set forth below, as well as facts set forth in a sealed Addendum<sup>1</sup> to this letter brief, the motion should be granted. Moreover, the State is simultaneously making a motion to dismiss the above-captioned Indictment on the same factual basis.

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<sup>1</sup> There is currently an ongoing re-investigation into the murders of Ms. Battie and Ms. Lewis by the Attorney General's Cold Case Network, a statewide network of regional task forces formed at the same time as the CRU to investigate cold cases, particularly cases generated by the CRU. For that reason, and for the safety of certain individuals who cooperated with the CRU re-investigation, a more specific factual recitation has been filed with the Court in the sealed Addendum.

This matter concerns the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, Conviction Review Unit's (hereinafter "CRU") review of State v. Taron Hill.<sup>2</sup> Defendant Taron Hill is currently serving a sixty (60) year parole ineligibility sentence for two counts of murder and related weapons charges. The murders of two women, who were unintended targets, occurred on September 25, 2004. Defendant Taron Hill claims actual innocence and asserts that his brother Anthony Hill is, in fact, the person who shot and killed the two victims. Taron Hill is now represented by Justin Bonus, Esq.

The CRU conducted an extensive re-investigation of the facts relevant to Mr. Hill's conviction, and concluded that there is clear and convincing evidence that Mr. Hill was wrongfully convicted. Much of this evidence was not available to the Camden County Prosecutor's Office at the time of Mr. Hill's trial or post-conviction hearings. The CRU identified a number of serious issues with Mr. Hill's conviction, including that there was only a single eyewitness who saw the assailant with a gun, who identified Mr. Hill through an identification procedure that used only a single photo. Although this evidence was admitted at trial, it is not an investigative best practice under the facts of this case.

While two jailhouse informants originally corroborated the eyewitness identification, both subsequently recanted their testimony. At the time, use of jailhouse informant testimony was subject to fewer safeguards. In October 2020, Attorney General Grewal issued Directive 2020-11 to ensure that best practices are followed by all prosecutors in New Jersey in evaluating testimony from jailhouse informants and deciding when to call them as witnesses.

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<sup>2</sup> In April, 2019, the New Jersey Attorney General created one of the first statewide conviction review units in the nation to be based in an Attorney General's Office. The unit reviews claims of actual innocence by persons convicted of felonies in New Jersey state courts to evaluate whether there is clear and convincing evidence of actual innocence.

The murder weapon was not recovered in the case, and no forensic evidence such as fingerprint or DNA evidence existed tying Mr. Hill to the murder. In addition, post-conviction recorded conversations support Mr. Hill's claim of actual innocence. Mr. Hill and his family members did not come forward with what they knew about the offense until after his trial and conviction.

Pursuant to R. 3:20-1, a trial judge upon a defendant's motion may grant a new trial if required in the interest of justice. A trial judge shall not, however, set aside the verdict of the jury as against the weight of the evidence unless, having given due regard to the opportunity of the jury to pass upon the credibility of the witnesses, it clearly and convincingly appears that there was a manifest denial of justice under the law. A motion for a new trial based on newly-found evidence can be made at any time.

In this matter, newly discovered evidence in combination with factual and legal issues has led the CRU to conclude that there exists a manifest denial of justice under the law so significant that Taron Hill's conviction should be vacated. Further, if the defendant's judgement is vacated and new trial is granted by the Court, the State would, upon its own motion, move to Dismiss the Indictment, thereby releasing the wrongfully convicted defendant who is presently incarcerated.

### **CONCLUSION**

For the reasons set forth above, Defendant Hill's Motion should be **GRANTED** and the State's motion to dismiss the Indictment should also be **GRANTED**.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ *Amy M. Knutsen*

Amy M. Knutsen, Attorney ID 042752007  
Deputy Attorney General

cc: Justin Bonus, Esq. (Defense counsel)

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