

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT  
IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Case Number: 21-01099CFANO

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CORNELIUS TREVON WHITFIELD,

Defendant.

---

DEPOSITION OF: JESSICA TIERNEY  
TAKEN BY: Counsel for the Defendant  
DATE: February 12, 2025  
TIME: 3:45 p.m. - 4:05 p.m.  
PLACE: ZOOM Videoconference  
REPORTED BY: Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR  
Notary Public, State of FL

Pages 1 - 22

JTP REPORTING (727)422-8287

ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE APPEARANCES

THEODORA TAKTIKOS-DANZIG, ESQUIRE

THOMAS KOSKINAS, ESQUIRE

Assistant State Attorneys

14250 49th Street North

Clearwater, Florida 34620

Attorneys for the State of Florida

JULIA SEIFER-SMITH, ESQUIRE

MARGARET RUSSELL, ESQUIRE

LAMARK MCGREEN, ESQUIRE

Assistant Public Defenders

14250 49th Street North

Clearwater, Florida 34620

Attorneys for the Defendant

## INDEX

JESSICA TIERNEY	PAGE:
Examination by Ms. Seifer-Smith.....	4
Certificate of Oath.....	20
Certificate of Reporter.....	21
Errata/Signature Page.....	22

## EXHIBITS

(No exhibits were marked for identification.)

1 WHEREUPON,

2 JESSICA TIERNEY

3 (the deponent herein, being first duly sworn, was examined  
4 and testified as follows:)

5 EXAMINATION

6 BY MS. SEIFER-SMITH:

7 Q Can you please state your name for our record.

8 A Sure, Jessica Lynn Tierney.

9 Q We're here in the matter of Cornelius Whitfield.  
10 Our court case number is 21-01099CF. My name is Julia  
11 Seifer-Smith. Together with Margaret Russell and Lamark  
12 McGreen, we represent Cornelius Whitfield. We're  
13 assistant public defenders. Also present on the Zoom call  
14 are Thomas Koskinas and Theodora Danzig. They're with the  
15 State Attorney's office. They're assistant state  
16 attorneys.

17 So before we got on record I showed you like an  
18 excerpt from a police report that documented their contact  
19 with you back in February of 2021. Did you have an  
20 opportunity to read that?

21 A Yes, I did.

22 Q Okay. And having read that excerpt, did that  
23 jog your memory as to your involvement in the police  
24 investigation at that time?

25 A Yes. I mean, ultimately, like, the -- I was a

1 regional at the time. I was not the property manager, and  
2 I got a call to the property when they had found out that  
3 the murder had occurred. Then from there, they had asked  
4 me about the activity that I did know about from the  
5 apartment, which is what was said in those statements, and  
6 those were the incidents that I could explain and then of  
7 course the resident who actually leased the apartment  
8 versus who lives in the apartment, which was explained.

9 Q Okay. So I just want to go over kind of a  
10 little bit more detail about what your job was, what the  
11 company was, things like that. So in February of 2021,  
12 who was your employer?

13 A Kimball Key, LLC.

14 Q Okay. And what kind of company was that?

15 A They're a property management company.

16 Q And what was your job with that company?

17 A I started out as a property manager but was  
18 promoted to a regional property manager in September of  
19 the previous year.

20 Q So September 2020?

21 A Yeah.

22 Q Okay. So were the Emerald Pointe Apartments a  
23 property that you oversaw as a regional manager?

24 A Yes. I was also the property manager there  
25 until September of 2020.

1           Q     Okay. So as the regional property manager, does  
2 that mean that you were no longer kind of based physically  
3 out of the property itself?

4           A     Correct.

5           Q     But it sounds like you had some personal  
6 familiarity with that property. Is that right?

7           A     Correct.

8           Q     Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about some  
9 of, like, the operating systems in terms of like what kind  
10 of information the company would keep regarding  
11 individuals who were tenants?

12          A     You mean like on file, or what do you mean by  
13 recording?

14          Q     Like on file. Like let's say for apartment 110,  
15 if somebody was to enter into a lease with your company,  
16 like what kind of information would you all have regarding  
17 that apartment?

18          A     Obviously, they go through the application  
19 process. So we do have an application, additionally a  
20 background screening, paystubs or income verification, a  
21 copy of their driver's license, and then obviously the  
22 signed lease agreement and renter's insurance is all due  
23 before time of move in.

24          Q     If there were any complaints regarding anything  
25 during the pendency of the tenancy, would that be part of

1 the file with respect to that particular apartment?

2 A They would receive lease violations to the door  
3 and then -- there's always a copy that goes to the door  
4 and then a copy that goes in the file to where if we ever  
5 have to do eviction proceedings based around a lease  
6 violation, we have that as a served document.

7 Q what would constitute like a potential lease  
8 violation?

9 A Anywhere from noise, unauthorized occupants,  
10 unauthorized pets, illegal behavior. Anything that would  
11 be considered criminal activity. Not paying rent,  
12 obviously the big one. But there's a whole slew of things  
13 that are outlined. We use the National Apartment  
14 Association Blue Moon Lease Agreement.

15 Q And if something didn't rise necessarily to the  
16 level for eviction proceedings but just kind of a general  
17 complaint, would that also be notated?

18 A Depending on what was actually given to the  
19 property manager, it could possibly be. From what I can  
20 remember, a lot of the activity before the situation had  
21 happened had gone directly to St. Petersburg Police  
22 Department of like the activity that was happening at the  
23 apartment, and I know residents had complained to the  
24 property manager in regards to the activity. As for a  
25 document going to the door in specific, I don't recall.

1 Q Okay. Just so we're clear, I guess we can kind  
2 of change gears and talk specifically about apartment 113,  
3 which was the subject of the investigation. So the tenant  
4 who was on the lease, it looks like she didn't sign a  
5 lease agreement until October of 2020. So that would have  
6 been after you left --

7 A Correct.

8 Q -- as opposed to being physically there. Is  
9 that right?

10 A Correct.

11 Q So did you -- do you personally have or do you  
12 recall having any kind of like personal, I guess, either  
13 contact with her or with anybody else at the apartment?

14 A No. So I did not meet Brittany until the day  
15 after the incident had occurred because she had to come  
16 and pack up the apartment.

17 Q So Brittany Barnes was the person who was like  
18 legally on the lease. Her name was on the lease. She was  
19 going to get any kind of lease violation-type records?

20 A Correct.

21 Q Okay. And so her file or rather the apartment  
22 113 file would have her application and all of the  
23 documentation?

24 A Correct. Correct.

25 Q Okay. Was the first time that you were alerted



1 about the concerns at apartment 113 when the police became  
2 involved because of the homicide?

3 A Correct.

4 Q Okay. And so can you tell me, if you know, how  
5 you were alerted to the actual homicide investigation?

6 A A maintenance tech actually gave me a call to  
7 let me know that the police had been at the property and  
8 that they needed me to show up because they could not get  
9 ahold of the property manager because of the murder that  
10 occurred at the property.

11 Q Do you know when that happened? Was that  
12 overnight or --

13 A Yeah. It was like 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning  
14 is when I got the phonecall.

15 Q Okay. And do you recall the name of that  
16 maintenance worker?

17 A Yes, Nathan Parker.

18 Q And do you remember Mr. Parker saying anything  
19 else to you?

20 A No.

21 Q What did you do once you got that call from him?

22 A I got dressed right away and drove straight to  
23 the property.

24 Q And do you know about what time you arrived  
25 there?

1 A I don't.

2 Q Okay. But still like early in the morning?

3 A Yes, ma'am. Yes.

4 Q And who did you have contact with once you  
5 arrived?

6 A Nathan was there to meet with me. I got brought  
7 over to the apartment where the officers were. I was  
8 advised that they could come and see me in a minute. So I  
9 went to the office and waited until they did come to speak  
10 with me.

11 Q Was there anybody else at the office?

12 A Other than maintenance personnel, no.

13 Q Okay. And was it officers or detectives who  
14 came to speak with you, if you know?

15 A I just remember one man and one woman in  
16 specific. I don't remember their names.

17 Q Do you remember if they were in uniform or they  
18 were in, like, civilian clothing?

19 A One was in a uniform, and I think the woman was  
20 in regular clothes. I think that's correct. There was a  
21 lot of people there.

22 Q Sure. Do you remember the conversation that you  
23 had with them?

24 A Not really.

25 Q Okay. Did you provide them with any kind of

1 documentation regarding apartment 113?

2 A No, not that I recall.

3 Q Okay. Would you have had access to any kind of  
4 information regarding 113, like the name of the tenant,  
5 anything like that at that point?

6 A I mean, I could have gone into the office to get  
7 the information because, obviously, the file is in the  
8 office. That's how I would know that belonged to Brittany  
9 Barnes, but that's all that I could say in this moment  
10 because I don't remember everything that happened that  
11 morning four years ago.

12 Q Okay. So it looks like in that notation from  
13 the police contact that you had that Brittany was put on  
14 notice of some complaints about unauthorized occupants,  
15 things like that. Would that have been information that  
16 you had pulled from the file?

17 A Correct.

18 Q Okay. And it looks like there was just an  
19 indication of Notice of Unauthorized Occupant but other  
20 complaints regarding possible narcotic activity. Do you  
21 know what --

22 A Which --

23 Q I'm sorry, go ahead.

24 A Yeah. So the property manager at the time had  
25 informed me that St. Petersburg Police Department had been

1 called on numerous occasions due to the activity, and  
2 based on the activity and what they could determine, they  
3 were telling the police that they believed there was drug  
4 activity that was going on at the home with how much  
5 visitors and in and out and exchanges of what they were  
6 doing. That all was reported to St. Petersburg Police is  
7 what the property manager explained to me by surrounding  
8 residents, and she said she called also as well.

9 Q What was the name of the property manager at  
10 that time?

11 A Danielle Williams.

12 Q Okay. Do you happen to know if she's still with  
13 the company?

14 A She is not.

15 Q Do you know when she left?

16 A Before I did. So it was only like maybe a few  
17 months after the situation had occurred that she had left  
18 because I left in September of 2021.

19 Q And do you happen to know if Ms. Williams had  
20 any contact with the police about this particular  
21 incident?

22 A I know when everything had happened that day all  
23 of them went home, and I had to stay and deal with it. So  
24 I don't think they ever actually talked to her about it.  
25 I believe I was the only one. Just based around the file

1 and speaking to them directly and then dealing with  
2 Ms. Barnes to get the stuff out of the apartment was on  
3 me.

4 Q Okay. It looks like there was some  
5 communication with the police about, like, surveillance in  
6 terms of what was available, like cameras, things like  
7 that, and you would have had personal knowledge of that  
8 because of your time at the complex, right?

9 A Correct.

10 Q Okay. I know there was some indication about  
11 some difficulty that you might have had uploading those  
12 files. Do you know if you were ever able to successfully  
13 provide them to police?

14 A I don't recall.

15 Q Okay. And I think there might have been some  
16 indication that earlier that very same day or I guess kind  
17 of like the prior day that there had been like some still  
18 photographs that were taken regarding some activity at the  
19 apartment. Does that sound familiar?

20 A No.

21 Q Okay. So you don't recall providing still  
22 photographs to the police?

23 A No.

24 Q Okay. And I think you said that the first  
25 contact that you had with Brittany Barnes, who was the

1 named occupant, was the day after the homicide, so never  
2 before that?

3 A Correct. Correct.

4 Q And can you tell me if and what you recall of  
5 your contact with her?

6 A That basically there was an incident at the  
7 apartment, which she already knew about; and that  
8 ultimately it was determined that obviously there was an  
9 unauthorized occupant that was living in the home; and  
10 that if she wished to not, you know, go through any court  
11 proceedings in regards to eviction, you know, she could  
12 come and pack up the apartment today once the police were  
13 finished. And she had like -- she was in there for like  
14 two hours, took everything that she wanted to take and  
15 then turned it back over to us.

16 Q And do you remember like what was in the  
17 apartment when she turned it back over to you?

18 A Yes. So in the living room, there was two brown  
19 couches, one loveseat, and one smaller couch. There was  
20 papers. There was a money counter in the bedroom, a  
21 dresser, a queen bed, laundry basket, a Versace belt on  
22 the -- I remember that because it was actually a really  
23 nice belt. It was on one of the bedside tables. There  
24 was lots of designer empty bags everywhere.

25 The kitchen had like a weight scale. There was

1 also, like, several supplements and cooking materials,  
2 plastic bags everywhere. The bathroom had typical  
3 toiletries and things in it. And I think there was like a  
4 small patio set out on the back lanai, but that's all that  
5 I can recall.

6 Q what was done with the contents of the apartment  
7 that she had left?

8 A So everything, you know, gets trashed out, and a  
9 company comes in and does the biohazard.

10 Q And so is that what was done here as far as you  
11 know?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Did you ever speak with any residents about what  
14 had occurred at that apartment?

15 A There was one apartment in particular. He was  
16 actually my longest resident that I had. His name is  
17 Gregory Swan. I believe he was in apartment 115. He was  
18 the one that saw the most activity, at least from  
19 everything that was said to me the day that this all  
20 happened.

21 But most of the time the residents at that  
22 apartment complex don't get involved with things, and they  
23 typically keep to themselves. So other than people trying  
24 to obviously get out of their lease agreement, to use that  
25 as the excuse that they feel unsafe, that was pretty much

1 the only conversation that I had in great detail revolved  
2 around the activity in the apartment, and then, you know,  
3 obviously hearing from the property manager that there was  
4 several residents, including him, that was calling the  
5 police department based around the activity.

6 Q when did you start with the company?

7 A April 2nd, 2018.

8 Q Were you only at the Emerald Pointe Apartments  
9 until you became the regional manager?

10 A Correct.

11 Q So you -- it sounds like you would have been  
12 really familiar with that complex having been there for a  
13 couple of years.

14 A Yeah.

15 Q And were there any similar apartments in terms  
16 of that type of complaint, like possible narcotic  
17 activity, unauthorized occupants, things like that?

18 A Not since we took it over in 2018. When we took  
19 it over in 2018 for The Harbor Group Apartments, it was  
20 known as the drug community. We had gentrified it,  
21 renovated, raised rents, and we basically kind of turned  
22 over the demographic there three times over in my first  
23 year. When we came in, it was 20-percent delinquent. And  
24 then we installed cameras. We had, you know, a lot of  
25 people knowing at that point that we were very diligent



1 about following lease agreements and catching on to things  
2 very quickly to get them out.

3           So we had really improved it. It just felt like  
4 the second that I got promoted that, you know, we fell  
5 back in to having people come into the community that  
6 wasn't qualified to stay, or they obviously illegally  
7 rented the apartment. We didn't have any other building  
8 that was having any of those issues. Like, we used to --  
9 building 350, which is up in the very front right when you  
10 came into the community, was known for being the building  
11 because you could drive in, get what you needed, and drive  
12 back out. But we didn't have those issues anymore until  
13 this happened.

14           Q     So at the time of this particular incident, like  
15 the homicide in February of 2021, it had been -- I think  
16 you said you left in -- not left but you were promoted in  
17 October. Is that right? I'm sorry, September.

18           A     September, yeah. We had bought a whole nother  
19 portfolio out in, like, Clearwater/Largo. So I was up  
20 there getting that property and doing due diligence.

21           Q     So between September and February, were there  
22 any other apartments at that particular complex that you  
23 were aware of having had similar issues?

24           A     No, ma'am.

25           Q     Okay. And would there have been any particular

1 types of like documentation that would have gone into the  
2 file for that apartment regarding the incident?

3 A So upon move out, so whenever you close that  
4 apartment, we have to attach move out photos. So  
5 everything in the home would be in that file.  
6 Additionally, you know, any charges, so like anything that  
7 would have been assigned to the security deposit. If  
8 there was a balance left over, then it would go to  
9 collections. That would go into the file if that was the  
10 case.

11 If I remember correctly with Brittany, you know,  
12 with her just getting out of the apartment, we didn't end  
13 up charging her for like an early termination. I believe  
14 we just charged for the damages in the home. But either  
15 way, that's all that goes in the file when people move  
16 out.

17 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Okay. I don't think I have  
18 any additional questions. Mr. Koskinas or  
19 Ms. Danzig, any questions?

20 MR. KOSKINAS: We do not. Thank you very much,  
21 Ms. Tierney, for your time.

22 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Thanks very much,  
23 Ms. Tierney. What I'm going to do is, I'm going to  
24 conclude the deposition. I'll reserve your right to  
25 read. What that means is that Ms. Pacheco, our court

1 reporter, has been taking down all the words that  
2 everybody has said. So if you're ever called in to  
3 court to give testimony at a hearing or at a trial,  
4 we'll make sure your testimony from this conversation  
5 is available to you in advance. You can check to  
6 make sure it was taken down accurately.

7 THE DEPONENT: Understood.

8 MS. SEIFER-SMITH: Thanks very much.

9 THE DEPONENT: welcome.

10 (Deposition concludes at 4:05 p.m.)  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

1 COUNTY OF PINELLAS )

2 STATE OF FLORIDA )

3 CERTIFICATE OF OATH

4  
5 I, the undersigned authority, certify that  
6 JESSICA TIERNEY personally appeared before me by Zoom  
7 videoconference and was duly sworn.

8 witness my hand and official seal this 10th day  
9 of March, 2025.

10  
11 Tamara M. Pacheco

12 Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR  
13 COMMISSION # 474485  
14 EXPIRES: March 30, 2028  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

## 1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

2 STATE OF FLORIDA )

3 COUNTY OF PINELLAS )  
4

5 I, Tamara M. Pacheco, certify that I was  
6 authorized to and did stenographically report the  
7 Deposition of Jessica Tierney; that a review of the  
8 transcript was requested; and that the transcript is a  
9 true and complete record of my stenographic notes.

10 I further certify that I am not a relative,  
11 employee, attorney or counsel of any of the parties, nor  
12 am I a relative or employee of any of the parties'  
13 attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I  
14 financially interested in the action.

15 Tamara M. Pacheco16 Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

# ERRATA SHEET

IN THE CASE OF:        STATE OF FL v. CORNELIUS WHITFIELD

NAME OF DEPONENT: JESSICA TIERNEY

CASE NUMBER: 21-01099CFANO

Please read the transcript of your deposition.  
If you feel you need to make corrections, please note on  
this page. DO NOT mark on the transcript itself.  
Sign and date the transcript below.

PAGE	LINE	ERROR/AMENDMENT	REASON FOR CHANGE
------	------	-----------------	-------------------

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Signature

Date