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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JEREMIAH WARD JOHNSTON SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON
FOR THE MURDER OF SARA ZGHOUL

HILLSBORO, Ore.- On December 4, 2019, Jeremiah Ward Johnston pleaded guilty to first-degree murder, second-degree kidnapping, first-degree abuse of a corpse and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder of a witness. He was sentenced to life with a minimum of 65 years in prison by Washington County Judge Ricardo Menchaca. Senior Deputy District Attorney John Gerhard and Deputy District Attorney Chris Lewman prosecuted Mr. Johnston. Mr. Johnston will be more than 100 years old before he becomes eligible for parole consideration.

On January 19, 2018, Mr. Johnston picked up Sara Zghoul from a hotel located in Beaverton, Oregon. Mr. Johnston then took the victim to his parent's house in an unincorporated area of Washington County, Oregon near Cooper Mountain.

Mr. Johnston was upset with the victim due to what he perceived as an unpaid drug debt. Mr. Johnston then attempted to use Ms. Zghoul to lure another drug dealer to the home with the intent to rob that drug dealer. He bound the victim with duct tape, but eventually released her from the restraints. Ms. Zghoul attempted to flee the home, but Mr. Johnston caught her at the top of a staircase and pushed her down a flight of stairs. Ms. Zghoul struck her head on a wall at the bottom of the stairs, likely resulting in a head injury. Mr. Johnston decided at that moment that he would kill Ms. Zghoul.

Mr. Johnston murdered Sara Zghoul and dismembered her body.

The defendant then contacted his friend who owned a fishing boat and told him about the murder. That acquaintance then reported to police what he had learned from Mr. Johnston, and police quickly located Mr. Johnston's vehicle. Mr. Johnston fled from police and unsuccessfully attempted suicide before he was arrested.

While in custody at the Washington County Jail, Mr. Johnston befriended an inmate and told him graphic details about murdering and dismembering Ms. Zghoul. He then offered the inmate \$50,000 to kill the friend who made the first report to police. Investigators uncovered the plot before it could be enacted.

The Washington County District Attorney's Office would like to acknowledge the Washington County Major Crimes Team, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, and Detective Brad Verboort for their work on this case.

A restitution hearing is scheduled for February 3, 2020.

Mr. Johnston will be transferred to the Oregon Department of Corrections to begin serving his sentence.