

# NEWS RELEASE

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Greensburg, PA – Westmoreland County District Attorney Nicole W. Ziccarelli announces the sentencing of Thomas Stanko, 55, following a first-degree murder conviction in the death and disappearance of Cassandra Gross.

Stanko was sentenced to serve mandatory life in prison without parole by Common Pleas Judge Michael Stewart on Friday, May 1, 2026. In addition to the life sentence, Judge Stewart sentenced Stanko to serve an additional 42 to 84 months, consecutively, for the conviction of reckless burning.

Stanko was convicted by a jury of first-degree murder and reckless burning in February of 2026 after a week-long trial.

In 2022, Stanko was charged by Pennsylvania State Police in connection with the death and disappearance of his estranged girlfriend, Cassandra Gross, who was reported missing in April of 2018. Her remains have never been located.

In the days that followed in April of 2018, Cassandra's vehicle was found burned along an access road in close proximity to Stanko's mother's house in Unity Township.

Gross was legally declared dead due to homicide by a Common Pleas Judge in 2019. Judge Stewart condemned Stanko's actions, and said during the sentencing, "The gravity of the offense is the worst possible crime that can be committed. The terror you inflicted on this woman is beyond comprehension."

"I know this is a day that the Gross family has longed for and after 8 excruciating years, justice has finally been served for Cassandra and her family. While this resolution will never bring Cassandra back, we can only hope this brings peace to her family who has continued to relive this day for nearly a decade," DA Ziccarelli said. "I am incredibly impressed by the relentless and exhaustive efforts of the Pennsylvania State Police investigators who never gave up on this case, and I applaud Assistant District Attorneys Jim Lazar and Katie Ranker Ellwood for their professionalism, merit, and integrity in presenting this case on behalf of the Commonwealth."

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