



Rex Heuermann sentencing: Victims' families statements will be 'real and raw,' Suffolk DA Ray Tierney says



Gilgo Beach serial killer Rex A. Heuermann is walked out of the Suffolk police Seventh Precinct on July 14, 2023. Credit: John Roca

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More than three decades after the death of his first confirmed victim, the families of eight women strangled by [Gilgo Beach serial killer Rex A. Heuermann](#), of Massapequa Park, will have their first opportunity to address the court Wednesday.

Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney said no limitations have been placed on the number of family members who can speak before state Supreme Court Justice Timothy P. Mazzei sentences Heuermann to life in prison. Tierney estimated that roughly two victim impact statements will be given per victim.

"This is the opportunity for the victims to speak in court," Tierney said. "Up to this point it's been about the defendant and safeguarding his rights and his presumption of innocence, and necessarily so, but that's over with now."

Tierney said he expects the family comments to be "real and raw."

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **More than a dozen victim** family members are expected to speak when Gilgo Beach serial killer Rex A. Heuermann is sentenced Wednesday.
- **The hearing will be filmed** by a media representative but not broadcast live.
- **Heuermann, who on April 8 pleaded** guilty to seven killings and admitted to an eighth, will receive multiple life sentences without the possibility of parole.

"This has been a long time coming for them," Suffolk's top prosecutor said.



Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney talks to reporters on April 8. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfof

For two of Heuermann's victims, the opportunity to be heard dates back more than 30 years. For each of the families, more than a decade has passed since the loss of their loved one, all women aged 20 to 34 who died between 1993 and 2010.

For Jessica Taylor, an upstate New York native who was 20 years old when she was killed by Heuermann in July 2003, the June 17 sentencing date falls on what would have been her 43rd birthday.

"I know that her family will be there for her in court and that she will never be forgotten by them," said Los Angeles-based victims' rights advocate and attorney Gloria Allred, who represents several of the families.

Allred wrote in an emailed statement that she expects her clients will "bravely speak to the court" Wednesday.

"The public will hear their pain and will hear about who the victims truly were, their importance and the bond they had with their families, which is now irreparably torn," the prominent attorney said.

Sentencing will be filmed

Victim impact statements are given at the start of a sentencing in New York State, followed by remarks from the prosecution, the defense and the defendant himself, should they exercise that right. Heuermann defense attorney Michael J. Brown, of Central Islip, has [declined to say](#) if his client will speak. The judge also typically makes remarks — Mazzei has in other high-profile cases — before pronouncing the sentence.



Michael J. Brown, the attorney for Rex A. Heuermann, leaves Suffolk County Court in Riverhead earlier this year. Credit: James Carbone

Courts spokesperson Timothy Finnerty told Newsday the sentencing will be filmed by a media representative, with the exception of portions where a speaker has requested to not be on camera. The hearing will not be broadcast live, he said.

[Heuermann, 62, a Manhattan architect, pleaded guilty](#) to the murders of Taylor, Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, Amber Lynn Costello, Valerie Mack and Sandra Costilla on April 8. He also admitted that morning to the uncharged 1996 killing of Karen Vergata.



Clockwise top row: Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman, Amber Lynn Costello, Karen Vergata. Bottom row from left, Maureen Brainard-Barnes, Jessica Taylor, Sandra Costilla, Valerie Mack. Credit: Newsday file

Heuermann will spend the rest of his life in state prison without the possibility of parole when Mazzei sentences him. Where he will serve his punishment has not publicly been established.

Consecutive sentences

Three consecutive life sentences will be given for first-degree murder in the killings of Barthelemy, Waterman and Costello because they were killed within two years of one another, an element of that charge. Heuermann is also expected to be sentenced to a consecutive sentence of 100 years to life imprisonment for second-degree murder in the killings of Brainard-Barnes, Taylor, Costilla and Mack.

The case began in May 2010, when Shannan Gilbert, a sex worker from Jersey City, went missing in the barrier island community of Oak Beach, after fleeing the house of a client.



An undated photograph of Shannan Gilbert from a missing person poster issued in Jersey City and Ulster County in 2010. Credit: Jersey City Police Department

While searching for Gilbert that December, Suffolk police found the first remains that would lead them to those of four other women, who would eventually be dubbed the "Gilgo Four." Seven additional sets of remains would be found in the area over the next year, including Gilbert's, those of an unidentified male whose killing has never been charged and those of a mother and child linked to a man arrested by Nassau County authorities just last year.

For years, the killings all remained unsolved. The district attorney's office and police department, under earlier leadership, were publicly at odds over the investigation with dueling theories of how many killers had committed the crimes.

Big break in cold probe

The investigation took a decisive turn in March 2022, when [Heuermann emerged as a suspect](#).

Tifini Atai, a state police investigator assigned to the Gilgo Beach Homicide Task Force, discovered while reexamining the case file that Costello had been picked up by a man driving a green Chevrolet Avalanche on the night she disappeared. Heuermann had driven such a vehicle and lived and worked in the areas where phone calls had been placed to victims.

The multiagency task force — drawing from the Suffolk County Police Department, New York State Police, FBI, Suffolk County Sheriff's Office and Suffolk County District Attorney's Office — deployed a sweeping array of forensic and surveillance tools. Investigators traced burner phones, mapped movements through cell site data and conducted advanced DNA testing on hair recovered from the victims' remains. They also placed [Heuermann under surveillance](#), eventually collecting his DNA from a discarded pizza crust he threw away in Manhattan, according to court filings.

He was arrested on July 13, 2023, as he walked away from his Manhattan office. Prosecutors have said the timing of the arrest was driven in part by concern he was still soliciting sex workers and might attack again.

'Sacrificed to help others'

Allred said the victims giving impact statements Wednesday will remember their loved ones more for the other titles they held in life: mothers, daughters, nieces, sisters and cousins.

"They were very upset that who their loved ones really were was not known to the public," Allred wrote in her statement. "They want the public to know that the victims were an important part of their family, who were loved and contributed emotionally and financially in many ways and sacrificed to help others."

Allred said Wednesday will be a restorative day for her clients.

"The sentencing will help in a small way with their healing, but it is going to take a great amount of courage to do it," she added. "I admire the fact that they have decided they want to be there and will do it, and I believe that their statements will do honor to their loved ones."