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## Suspects in student's death released on bond

By: Shannon Peluso

GASTONIA, N.C. -- Both men accused of murdering UNC Charlotte student Irina Yarmolenko in May are now out of jail.

Mark Carver and Neal Cassada were released from the Gaston County jail after a judge reduced their bond to \$100,000 on Thursday. Cassada left that evening, with Carver following on Friday morning.

The two were arrested and charged in the 20-year-old student's murder in December. Her body was found lying next to her car in May along the Catawba River where she had gone to take photos for a class project.



The body of Irina Yarmolenko was found along the Catawba River in May.

Carver walked out of the jail with one family member and a crowd of media to greet him. A similar scene unfolded on Thursday night after Cassada posted bond. Neither man had much to say as they left, but both claimed innocence.

A judge lowered their bonds on Thursday from \$1 million to \$100,000. The reason is still not clear, though Carver's defense attorney told News 14 Carolina that a \$100,000 bond is an appropriate amount for a case like this.

According to Sandra Jordan, a professor from the Charlotte School of Law, bond settings and how a judge would come to the decision to drastically reduce a bond differs for every case.

"Technically, bail is to ensure the appearance of the defendant at the time and place of the trial," she said. "But we know that in reality the more serious the crime, the more likely it is that a high bail will be set."

Jordan says \$100,000 is considered to be a high bail amount in the legal world.

Earlier this week, a judge said that DNA collected from Yarmolenko's car matched both suspects. According to Carver's attorney, there is still testing being done on evidence that might have been found around the girl's neck – including a bungee cord, a backpack string and a hoodie string.



Neal Cassada posted bond and left jail on Thursday night.



Mark Carver posted bond and left jail on Friday morning.

The attorney – Brent Ratchford – said the DNA evidence is the only evidence that the prosecution has, and that "based on what I've been presented so far, I do think Mr. Carver is innocent. Absolutely."

The DNA of a third person was found on Yarmolenko's car, but at this point investigators are still looking for a match.

For now, both Carver and Cassada will be on electronic house arrest until their next court date. That date is pending.

Yarmolenko attended high school in Chapel Hill. Her family did not wish to comment on camera about these latest developments.

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