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## Stephan Sterns Accepts Plea in Murder and Sexual Battery Case of Madeline Soto

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— Categories: Crime



Stephan Sterns, the former boyfriend of Madeline Soto’s mother, has entered a no-contest plea to the murder of 13-year-old Madeline Soto and a guilty plea to sexual battery charges. This significant development occurred during a plea hearing on Monday, potentially bringing a measure of closure to a case that has gripped the community. The resolution spares Madeline’s family the arduous process of a protracted trial, with Sterns facing immediate sentencing to life in prison without parole.

The plea agreement prevents separate trials for the sexual abuse and murder charges, which were originally scheduled to begin this week and in September, respectively. By pleading no contest to the murder charge, Sterns does not explicitly admit guilt but accepts the criminal conviction and punishment as if he had been found guilty. His guilty plea to the sexual battery charges signifies an admission of responsibility for those specific offenses. This outcome ensures that Sterns will be held accountable for his heinous acts and will serve concurrent life sentences, effectively eliminating any possibility of future freedom.

The State Attorney's Office affirmed that this plea deal was reached in close consultation with Madeline Soto's family, providing a definitive resolution and sparing them from enduring the emotional toll of a prolonged legal battle.

Madeline Soto vanished in 2024, just one day after her 13th birthday celebration. Initial reports from Sterns suggested he had dropped the teenager off a few blocks from Hunter's Creek Middle School in Orange County. However, investigators quickly discovered that Madeline never arrived at the school, raising immediate concerns about her safety. The Kissimmee Police Department, along with other law enforcement agencies, launched an intensive search, which ultimately led to the tragic discovery of Madeline's body along a road in Osceola County. Police believe Sterns was responsible for her death and the subsequent disposal of her remains.

A crucial turning point in the investigation came when officials uncovered disturbing photographs and videos on Sterns' mobile phone, depicting the sexual abuse of Madeline. This grim discovery led to Sterns' immediate arrest on charges of sexual battery and possession of child sexual abuse material. At the time of his plea, Sterns was facing a staggering 60 charges related to sexual abuse, a testament to the disturbing nature and alleged extent of his actions.

In April 2025, a grand jury formally indicted Sterns for first-degree murder, following an exhaustive effort by officials to gather and analyze every available piece of evidence. The meticulous work of law enforcement was highlighted by former Kissimmee Police Chief Betty Holland, who stated, "The evidence shows an individual that was entrusted to keep Madeline safe made calculated moves to dispose of Madeline's belongings and place her body in a wooded area before she was ever reported missing."

Court documents filed by the State Attorney's Office further revealed the chilling timeline of abuse, asserting that Sterns had been sexually abusing a child as far back as 2019, when

Madeline would have been approximately eight years old. This revelation painted a horrifying picture of a predator operating under the guise of a trusted figure within the family.