

Jury Convicts Karina Cooper in 2021 Iowa Murder Case

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Karina Sue Cooper has been found guilty of first-degree murder for the 2021 killing of her husband, Ryan Cooper, in rural Iowa. The unanimous verdict followed an eight-day trial in Cedar Rapids and marks the culmination of more than four years of investigation and legal proceedings.

The jury's decision was delivered after just over three hours of deliberation at the Linn County Courthouse. Cooper, now 48, was convicted of intentionally participating in the murder of her husband, a father and local farmer, who was shot and killed in June 2021. Prosecutors portrayed the killing as a carefully orchestrated plot involving another individual, 27-year-old Huston William Danker, who awaits his own trial next month.

Assistant Attorney General Michael Ringle led the prosecution, presenting digital evidence that included Snapchat messages allegedly exchanged between Cooper and Danker. One message mentioned shell casings, while another showed Cooper replying with the word "Go," which prosecutors argued demonstrated intent and planning. Ringle supported the state's case with forensic analysis such as bullet trajectory, footprints, and gunshot residue to tie Cooper directly to the scene and suggest deliberate actions to cover her tracks.

In her defense, Public Defender Nichole Watt argued Cooper's actions were motivated by emotional manipulation and fear, not criminal intent. Watt questioned the reliability of the social media data and maintained that there was no definitive proof that Cooper ordered or carried out the murder. She painted Danker as a coercive figure, asserting that Cooper had been overwhelmed by circumstances beyond her control.

Testimony from friends and family of the Coopers provided insight into a troubled marriage. Several witnesses recounted disturbing comments made by Karina Cooper in the years before the shooting, including threats and signs of growing hostility. Brian Morrison, a longtime friend of Ryan Cooper, recalled a comment made by Karina in 2020: "I could shoot you in the face." Morrison testified that the statement was not a joke and that it reflected a pattern of resentment.

Other residents, including former friends and acquaintances, described Karina Cooper as increasingly secretive and emotionally volatile in the months leading up to the murder. Testimony also indicated she had financial motives and was attempting to distance herself from the family business. Ryan's sister, Michelle Cooper Wilson, who handled the farm's bookkeeping, told the court that Karina had been removed from the family phone plan well before the murder and that Ryan appeared to be gathering evidence about her connection to Danker.

The courtroom reacted with emotion as the verdict was read. Cooper was taken into custody immediately, her \$1 million bond revoked, and she now faces a mandatory

sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole. Sentencing is scheduled for September 5 at the Tama County Courthouse.

Following the verdict, Wilson shared a heartfelt message on social media, thanking the legal team, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI), and the Tama County Sheriff's Department for their dedication. "We have justice for Ryan," she wrote, "but it does not bring back our brother, son, friend, and father."

Tama County Sheriff Casey Schmidt also issued a statement acknowledging the work of investigators and expressing hope that the verdict would bring a measure of peace to the family. "Ryan Cooper mattered, and we will not forget him," Schmidt said. He further added that although the trial has ended, justice continues to unfold.

Huston Danker, who is also charged with first-degree murder, is scheduled to stand trial on August 12 in Johnson County District Court. His legal team plans to assert an alibi, claiming he was at his parents' home at the time of the shooting. He remains in custody at the Marshall County Jail with a bond set at \$1 million.