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**Adrian Chavez Found Guilty of the Murders of Two Homeless Women:
First Trial in the U.S. Utilizing Evidence from Innovative DNA Testing**
People v. Adrian Chavez: Kern County Superior Court Case BF187877A

(Bakersfield) – Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a significant conviction today. On January 22, 2024, a Kern County Jury found Adrian Chavez guilty of the First-Degree Murders of Marilyn Cuervo and Crystal Hernandez. The jury also found the defendant guilty of the special circumstance of multiple murders. This case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney John Allen.

On October 12, 2020, Marilyn Cuervo was found deceased in a dirt field behind the Desert Star motel off Union Avenue in Bakersfield. When discovered by law enforcement, she was found to have suffered significant blunt force injuries resulting in her death. On July 26, 2021, Bakersfield Police officers again responded to the Desert Star motel, which was now abandoned, and located defendant Adrian Chavez and Crystal Hernandez. Responding officers immediately observed Hernandez had also suffered significant blunt force injuries (similar Cuervo) resulting in her death. The investigation of both homicides revealed Chavez was seen with both Hernandez and Cuervo near the time of their murders. Further, physical evidence showed both women suffered nearly identical violent assaults with the use of blunt force instruments. Forensic evidence, including DNA and fingerprints, directly linked Chavez to both Cuervo's and Hernandez's deaths.

This case marked the first time Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) DNA testing was introduced as evidence in a jury trial in the United States. The Kern Regional Crime Lab (KRCL) validated and implemented Verogen's MiSeq FGx Sequencing System to allow for in-house Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) testing. NGS DNA testing enables the Kern Regional Crime Lab to test 152 genetic markers (forensic loci) in a single sampling of an evidence item compared to the previous method which identified 24 genetic markers. The improved technology increases the likelihood of recovering additional genetic information from evidence items than traditional testing methods. Following an extensive pre-trial admissibility hearing, the trial court deemed NGS to be reliable and that the technique has gained general acceptance in the scientific field. In the present case, NGS testing was used to establish the location of the crime scene in Hernandez's murder. Further, NGS testing was helpful in determining the circumstances of the violent assault in the abandoned motel room.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented on the conviction; “Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) is a groundbreaking advancement in DNA evidence testing. I’m proud of our Kern Regional Crime Lab for pioneering this state-of-the-art method and introducing it for the first time in a U.S. trial. This technology is a game-changer for solving crimes, as the extensive information it provides will lead us to even more significant discoveries.”

Sentencing is scheduled for February 21, 2024, in Department 4 in front of the Honorable Judge Charles Brehmer. Chavez faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Adrian Chavez:

