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Merlin Found Guilty of Murder During Commission of Robbery
People v. Jose Barraza: Kern County Superior Court Case BF192742A

(Bakersfield) – Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a significant murder conviction. On August 6, 2024, a Kern County jury found Jose Barraza guilty of the first-degree murder of Merlin Rodriguez during the commission of a robbery. This case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Cole Sherman.

On July 20, 2022, victim Merlin Rodriguez and his seventeen-year-old brother were travelling back to their home in the Bay Area in Merlin's 2008 BMW sedan when they ran out of gas in Arvin. Out of gas and money, the brothers remained stranded while awaiting a Western Union money transfer from family. While parked next to DiGiorgio park in Arvin, Jose Barraza approached the brothers a couple of days later on July 22, 2022. After hearing about the incoming money transfer and their gas problems, Barraza offered to "help them." Unbeknownst to Merlin, Barraza made a plan to rob Merlin and take his BMW. While pretending to help them, Barraza took the brothers around Arvin and helped them collect a few dollars that was put toward gas money.

Around 6:00 p.m., while at a residence, Barraza offered to drive Merlin to Bakersfield to take him to someone who could help provide additional money for gas. The victim's brother remained at the residence. However, Barraza instead drove to a rural area outside of Arvin where he could carry out his criminal plan. While driving the BMW, Barraza suddenly began stabbing Merlin, who was seated in the front passenger seat, hitting Merlin's face, chest, and back. Barraza stopped the car, dragged Merlin outside, and left him lying in the dirt shoulder, where Merlin succumbed to his stab wounds. Barraza drove Merlin's BMW to Bakersfield where he later sold it for \$500.

Four days later, Barraza was arrested on an unrelated incident for vehicle theft and recklessly evading arrest. When he was arrested, Barraza was found to be in possession of the victim's missing cell phone. A thorough investigation by the Kern County Sheriff's Department uncovered eyewitness information, DNA evidence, and cell phone records tying Barraza to the crime. Additionally, the jury heard evidence

that in February of 2020, Barraza committed another carjacking in Arvin in which he stabbed a man in the chest and then stole his vehicle.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented; “Barraza is a heartless individual who targeted someone in need and executed a murder over \$500. It's unfortunate that in today's world, we can't always rely on those who extend a helping hand.”

Sentencing is set for September 4, 2024, before the Honorable Judge John Lua in Department 5 of the Kern County Superior Court. Barraza faces up to 56 years to life in prison.

Jose Barraza:

