



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF KERN**

CIVIC CENTER JUSTICE BUILDING
1215 TRUXTUN AVENUE
BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA 93301
(661) 868-2340, FAX: (661) 868-2700

ANDREA S. KOHLER
Assistant District Attorney

CYNTHIA J. ZIMMER
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

JOSEPH A. KINZEL
Assistant District Attorney

January 20, 2021
MEDIA ADVISORY

CONTACT:
DDA William Schlaerth
(661) 868-2340

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Approved by JAK
Press Release 21-03

Jury Trial Homicide Case Conviction: Joel Rodriguez, case BF171316 B+C

On Tuesday January 19, 2021, a Kern County jury found Joel Rodriguez guilty of second-degree murder and assault with a deadly weapon for the stabbing death of Kasey Villegas that occurred near the Fox Theatre in Bakersfield in February of 2018. A second defendant, Jesse Reyes, was found guilty Felony Assault With Force Likely to Cause Great Bodily Injury. Two additional defendants, Efrain Ugues and Heraclio Ugues were found not guilty of the charged offenses.

On the night of February 18, 2018, Kasey Villegas attended a Bone Thugs-N-Harmony concert with members of his family. During the concert, Villegas initiated a verbal altercation with Efrain Ugues and members of his family. Outside the theatre, Villegas approached Ugues and tried to fight Ugues in the alley behind the theatre. Efrain Ugues, along with co-defendants Heraclio Ugues, Jesse Reyes, and Joel Rodriguez pursued Villegas, chasing him out of the alley. Up to that point, there was no physical violence.

The defendants' vehicle crossed H Street to pick up the last member of their party, who was just leaving the theatre. Villegas saw their vehicle and approached the defendants again to start a fight. All four defendants got out of their car and, after some more argument, a fist fight started. Heraclio Ugues threw the first punch but was tackled by Maria Toscano, Villegas's girlfriend who was six months pregnant. Heraclio Ugues threw Toscano to the ground and did not rejoin the fight.

Meanwhile, Efrain Ugues, Jesse Reyes, and Joel Rodriguez continued the fist fight with Villegas, who retreated across the street during the exchange. The fist fight lasted from 12 to 15 seconds, with up to 20 punches being thrown in an attack that looked "like wasps" according to one eyewitness. The fist fight ended when Rodriguez pulled out a concealed knife and stabbed Villegas four times in the head. As Villegas lay dying on the sidewalk, Reyes kicked him in the head. The jury found Reyes guilty of felony Assault with Force Likely to Cause Great Bodily Injury.

Commenting on the verdict, District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer said, "Recent changes to California law have allowed more opportunities for groups of assailants to avoid homicide liability, even when the actions taken by group members as a whole are likely to, and actually do result in death of the victim. In this case,

the person most directly responsible for the injury was convicted of murder, and the assailant who kicked the victim while he was down was held accountable for the felony assault.”

In addition to Joel Rodriguez’s murder conviction, Jesse Reyes was convicted of one count of assault with force likely to cause great bodily injury. A sentencing date was set for both Rodriguez and Reyes on Wednesday, February 17, 2021, in front of Judge Charles Brehmer. Rodriguez faces a maximum sentence of 40 years to life in prison. The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney William Schlaerth.