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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Approved by JAK
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Re: Jury Trial Murder Conviction: Jose Manual Gonzalez BF 165899A

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a jury trial conviction on a significant murder case today. On Wednesday, March 10, a Kern County jury found Jose Gonzalez guilty of all charged offenses, including of one count of first-degree murder and count of attempted murder as well as an additional charge for being a previous felon in unlawful possession of a firearm. The court separately found true allegations that Gonzalez already had committed a prior “strike” conviction at the time he committed the charged offenses in the case, which may serve to increase his sentence. The case was presented by Deputy District Attorney Gina Pearl.

On the night of November 5, 2015, Jose Gonzalez –who also goes by the moniker of “Panic” – drove with two unidentified accomplices to a trucking company located in Arvin. Once there, Gonzalez and his accomplices get out of the vehicle and yelled by name for two men who were inside a building, Antonio Reyes and Juan De La Garza, demanding they come outside. Reyes and De La Garza both exited the building, at which point Gonzalez attempted to kidnap De La Garza. De La Garza resisted, and during the struggle, Gonzalez produced a handgun and shot De La Garza in the head. One of Gonzalez’ accomplices then shot Reyes in the back with a 12-gauge shotgun, killing him immediately.

De La Garza, despite being shot in the head and being left for dead by the defendant, survived his injuries. A witness who heard the gunshots notified authorities, leading to a KCSO investigation of the case. Gonzalez was identified via eyewitness testimony as well as through DNA evidence. A warrant was issued for Gonzalez’ arrest in July of 2016, but he was not apprehended until June of 2020 when Gonzalez was spotted back in Kern County. Gonzalez and his accomplices fled the scene after the shooting, and Gonzalez later acknowledged that he had been “on the run for five years.”

Advised of the conviction, District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented: “Murder cases often take years for investigation, identification, and apprehension finally begin a trial. When a murder suspect flees the Kern County, or even the United States, law enforcement does not stop searching to ensure that the suspect is apprehended and prosecuted. The efforts of the entire law enforcement community were successful in ensuring a violent felon is not permitted to stay on our streets.”

Jose Manual Gonzalez:

