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August 5, 2022

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Approved by CJZ
Press Release # 22-48

Re: Trial Arson/Assault Conviction: People v. Erick Torres, Kern County Superior Court Case #BF183899A

(Bakersfield) -- Kern County District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer announced a verdict on a significant arson case involving Molotov Cocktails. On Thursday August 4, 2022, a Kern County jury found defendant, Erick Torres, guilty of several felony charges including assault with a deadly weapon, arson of an inhabited structure, kidnapping of a USPS worker, criminal threats, attempted arson, possession of a destructive device with the intent to injure or damage property, and resisting arrest. The jury found Torres not guilty of attempted murder but convicted on the lesser-included offense of assault with a deadly weapon and all other charges and enhancements. In total, Torres was convicted of nine separate serious or violent strike offenses affecting two separate victims. Evidence in the trial was presented by Deputy District Attorney Leanne Wilder.

On January 12, 2021, at about 11 o'clock in the morning, Erick Torres broke into the backyard of his first victim and threw two Molotov cocktails filled with gasoline through a bedroom window while two people were inside the home. A fire ignited. Arson investigators determined that the Molotov cocktails ignited surrounding materials and caused moderate fire damage to the home as well as damage to furniture inside the residence. Torres fled the scene in a vehicle that was found abandoned and doused in gasoline at an intersection close to the victim's home. Shortly after abandoning his vehicle, and now on foot, Torres aggressively approached a United States Postal Service employee that was delivering mail in his mail truck. Torres, while holding a metal bar, demanded the driver to "give me a ride or you are going to die." Torres forced the postal worker into the mail truck and demanded him to drive Torres away. A witness who observed the incident caught up to the mail truck and intervened which resulted in Torres demanding the postal worker to stop, allowing Torres to escape on foot.

Two days later, at approximately 4 am on January 14, 2021, Torres returned to his first victim's home. Torres again came armed with a Molotov cocktail and threw it through a front bedroom window. After throwing the Molotov cocktail, surveillance video showed Torres pouring gasoline on the victim's car, which was parked in front of the residence. Torres then ignited the car, causing it to erupt into flames. Officers with the Bakersfield Police Department responded and arrived while Torres was still at the scene. Torres fled from officers but was chased and arrested. Arson investigators determined the entire inside of the vehicle was destroyed by the blaze set by Torres with the aid of the gasoline he used as an accelerant.

District Attorney Cynthia Zimmer commented on the conviction, stating; "Over the course of two days, Torres committed multiple violent strike offenses. He more than once attempted to set the victim's home on fire with Molotov cocktails, set fire a vehicle belonging to the victim, and further victimized others by kidnapping a letter carrier in his efforts to escape."

On September 1, 2022, the matter will go before the Honorable Charles Brehmer for sentencing. Torres faces up to 24 years in prison as a result of the convictions.

Erick Torres:

