

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

SALINAS GANG MEMBER SENTENCED TO LIFE FOR THE DRIVE-BY MURDER OF AZAHEL CRUZ

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that Bernardo Camacho, age 24, a resident of Salinas, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the murder of six year old Azahel Cruz. The Honorable Pamela Butler of the Monterey County Superior Court sentenced the defendant for his murder conviction after a two-week jury trial.

At about 6:00 p.m. on March 23, 2010, Mr. Camacho rode in the front passenger seat in a car driven by Edmundo Pulido. As they drove by the Pocket Park located at 1110 East Laurel Drive in Salinas, Mr. Camacho stuck his firearm out the passenger window and shot several times at rival gang members in the park. Although Mr. Camacho missed everybody in the park, one of the stray bullets went through a bordering fence and into a neighboring apartment. Azahel Cruz was standing in the kitchen of that apartment when the bullet went through his head, killing him instantly. The bullet continued through another wall and into the living room, where it shattered a mirror and sprayed glass on the mother and other family members of Azahel Cruz. Knowing that her son was in the kitchen, the mother of Azahel Cruz immediately ran there and found her son unconscious on the floor bleeding from both sides of his head.

The defendant and co-defendant Pulido quickly drove away from the scene and, within a few days, the defendant fled to Mexico. Due to the lack of identification and lack of cooperation by witnesses at scene of the shooting, the case went unsolved for several years. Nevertheless, due to the dogged investigative efforts of Salinas Police Department Detective Tom Larkin and Monterey County District Attorney Investigator Peter Austen, they discovered several witnesses to whom the defendant admitted his involvement in the crime. Although the witnesses initially were reticent and reluctant to cooperate with the investigation, they eventually agreed to and did testify at the trial. Soon after the defendant's arrest in Mexico and extradition back to Monterey County in 2013, law enforcement authorities also discovered a jail note written by the defendant that detailed his involvement. Mr. Edmundo Pulido, the driver of the vehicle that was used during the drive-by shooting, previously pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 35 years to life.

At the sentencing of Mr. Camacho, the mother of Azahel Cruz expressed her appreciation for all of the law enforcement agencies that investigated and prosecuted Mr. Camacho. Furthermore, she thanked "everyone who worked very hard to bring justice to her son, Azahel."