

*** NEWS RELEASE ***

CASTROVILLE WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO MURDER OF SISTER'S LIFELONG FRIEND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Monterey County District Attorney Dean D. Flippo announced today that Melissa Paniagua, age 29, pled guilty to second degree murder and admitted a special allegation for the use of a firearm during the commission of the murder.

On July 20, 2017, Paniagua's sister and the victim who were lifelong friends, were hanging out together at the victim's house. An argument ensued between the two that resulted in a physical altercation. Paniagua's sister left the victim's residence after the altercation but left her tablet behind.

Paniagua returned to the victim's residence later that night to retrieve the tablet. Paniagua knocked on the victim's door for several minutes before the victim's daughter opened the door to see what she wanted. Paniagua explained that she wanted the tablet and the victim's daughter told her to wait outside while she looked for it. The victim's daughter was unable to find the tablet and went to ask the victim what to do. At this time Paniagua had pushed the door open and was refusing to leave the house. The victim went to speak to Paniagua and instructed her daughter to call 911.

The victim's daughter went to her room to call 911, but was still able to hear the victim and Paniagua arguing. A few minutes into that argument the victim's daughter heard a single gunshot. She ran out to check on her mom and discovered she was struggling to breathe. Paniagua fled the scene. The victim died within minutes from a single gunshot wound to her back.

This case was investigated by the Monterey County Sheriff's Department Robbery and Homicide Unit. Paniagua will be sentenced on May 3, 2018 by Judge Julie R. Culver to 25 years - life in prison.