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For Immediate Release

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DA Credits Relationship-Building for International Extradition Successes

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie Dumanis](#) today said her office has seen an increase in successful extraditions of criminals to San Diego to face criminal charges -- particularly from Mexico -- thanks to a focus on relationship-building.

“Our Extradition Unit works tirelessly along with our law enforcement partners on both sides of the border to track down fugitives and bring them back to San Diego where they can be held accountable for their crimes,” DA Dumanis said. “In recent years, that’s been happening more often. Thanks to hard work, we’ve have been able to build key relationships with our international law enforcement counterparts, often resulting in a streamlining of the extradition process.”

A recent example of domestic extradition success is today’s arraignment of defendant Brett Wagner. Wagner was extradited from Mississippi on child molestation charges stemming from crimes he committed over time between 1997 and 2004. He was located and arrested in early June. Wagner was arraigned in San Diego Superior Court today 14 counts of child molestation. He faces up to 30 years in state prison.

The DA’s Office has successfully extradited hundreds of criminals over the years from within the United States and internationally. Over the last two years, 172 defendants were apprehended somewhere in the United States and brought back to San Diego to face charges. Since 2008, nine suspects, all Mexican nationals who had committed serious and violent offenses in San Diego, were extradited from Mexico to San Diego. Six more fugitives facing serious and violent charges are currently in the custody of Mexican authorities and are awaiting formal extradition.

“That might not sound like a lot of extraditions from our neighbor to the south, but prior to 2008, we had not had any formal extraditions from Mexico,” said Deputy District Attorney Sylvia Tenorio, who handles domestic and international extraditions for the District Attorney’s Office. “We’re making great progress and we’re heading in the right direction.”

In the last three years, our office has also been successful in securing the deportation of two high profile American citizen fugitives from Brazil and Taiwan facing multiple child molestation charges in San Diego with the assistance of U.S. federal law enforcement agencies.

Extraditing defendants from Mexico and other foreign countries can be challenging because it is a formal process governed by international treaties between the United States and other countries and there are several federal agencies involved in the process.

Obtaining provisional arrest warrants can often be delayed by bureaucracy. In recent years, however, the San Diego County District Attorney's Office has been successful in building relationships with the U.S. Department of Justice/Office of International Affairs, U.S. State Department, the Mexican Attorney General's Office and federal law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border. As a result, foreign law enforcement authorities have been more responsive and willing to assist our office in obtaining and executing provisional arrest warrants and Mexican federal courts have granted more extradition requests.

Extraditing defendants in a timely manner can be critical to prosecuting criminal cases. When defendants flee San Diego's jurisdiction, the case often becomes weaker with time. Witnesses move or die and memories dim as time goes by while the fugitive is at large. In sexual assault and child molestation cases, there are concerns the defendant will continue to victimize others while he or she remains on the run. "Victims suffer emotionally," DA Dumanis said. "Knowing that the defendant is still at large makes them feel vulnerable and unsafe."

In 2009, Alejandro Avalos Fernandez was arrested in Mexico for murdering and sexually assaulting an elderly woman in Carlsbad in 2001. After he was extradited to San Diego, he pled guilty to murder, rape and assault and was sentenced to 34 years in prison. "There are many stories like this," DDA Tenorio said. "Fugitives think they can hide, but we eventually find them and bring them back to face charges."

Another critical factor that has paved the way to the extradition of Mexican nationals is a 2001 Mexican Supreme Court decision that interpreted the Mexican Constitution to permit the extradition of nationals to other countries.

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