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**For Immediate Release**

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# **24 Year Prison Term for Gang Member Who Shot and Paralyzed Innocent Teen**

## **Victim Caught in the Crosshairs of Gang-Related Gunfire**

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that the prosecutions of three gang members involved in a shootout two years ago that left an innocent teen girl paralyzed has concluded with the final defendant, Juan Velazco Diaz, 21, being sentenced to 24 years in state prison for his violent crimes.

On October 28, 2023, two rival gang groups collided outside of a high school party in the Talmadge area of San Diego. After exchanging verbal gang challenges, a member of each gang, Juan Velazco Diaz and Kenneth Hill, produced guns and shot at each other. Velazco Diaz shot first, missed his target and the bullet struck 17-year-old high school cheerleader Brianna Wallace, who happened to be standing across the street near the 4400 block of Winona Avenue. Wallace was shot in the back and was instantly paralyzed from the waist down.

“It is heartbreaking when innocent members of our community are caught in the crossfire of senseless gang violence,” said DA Stephan. “Our hearts go out to the teen victim whose brave testimony was pivotal in obtaining justice in this case. Acts of gang violence devastate neighborhoods and will never be tolerated. Our office remains committed to holding those who would commit such violence fully accountable and to working with our law enforcement partners to reduce organized gang crime and prevent these tragedies from happening.”

After a joint investigation between the San Diego Police Department Gang Unit and the District Attorney’s Office’s Gangs Unit, Velazco Diaz, Kenneth Hill, 20, and Davian Austin, 21, were all arrested for their involvement and prosecuted. Hill and Austin were convicted of assault with a firearm, and Velazco Diaz was convicted of attempted murder with the use of a firearm and assault with the use of a firearm causing paralysis. Hill received a nine-year prison term. Austin received a sentence of one year in jail and was placed formal probation for two years.

Deputy District Attorney Kyle Sutterley in the DA’s Gangs Division prosecuted this case.

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The DA's Gangs Division prosecutes complex murder cases and other serious crimes perpetrated by violent gang members who terrorize neighborhoods. These cases are handled by one prosecutor from beginning to end – also called vertical prosecution. Cases in this division are expertly navigated by 26 prosecutors and 20 investigators to bring justice to families left in the wake of violence. In 2024, the Gangs Division conducted 23 murder jury trials, which is more than 40% of the total murders tried in the DA's office. The division also prosecuted other cases including kidnapping for rape, assault with great bodily injury, robbery, carjacking and possession of illegal firearms, such as ghost guns, by gang members.

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*About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office*

*The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.*

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