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Gang Member Sentenced to Life Without Parole for Murdering Teenager in Broad Daylight

16-Year-Old Killed in Gang-Motivated Retaliation Attack

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan said today that Andy Phonsongkham, 22, was sentenced to life without parole after being found guilty of murdering 16-year-old Carlos Valdovinos, attempting to murder three of the victim's companions, and shooting at an occupied residence. The shooting was in retaliation for an assault against a fellow gang member. The sentencing comes as prosecutors confirmed that gang violence continues to increase across San Diego County.

Phonsongkham's full sentence is life without parole for the murder of Valdovinos, plus 13 years and 4 months for the attempted murder of the three additional minor victims and shooting at an occupied residence. The court also imposed a sentence of an additional 150 years to life on the sentence based on the murder and firearms allegations.

On May 23, 2019, a member of Phonsongkham's gang was attacked by four members of a rival gang. Phonsongkham retaliated by arming himself with a semiautomatic handgun and driving to Linda Vista, searching for rival gang members around Kelly Street.

About 6 p.m., Phonsongkham pulled up to where 16-year-old Carlos Valdovinos was standing and shot him in broad daylight and in the presence of neighbors and children. One of the bullets fatally struck the victim in the back. Phonsongkham also attempted to kill Valdovinos' friends who were standing near him. The boys, ranging in age from 14 to 16-years-old, were not injured. Three of Phonsongkham's bullets struck an occupied home where two children, ages 8 and 14, were home alone.

The San Diego Police Department's Street Gang and Homicide Units worked together to identify the defendant based on surveillance video and witness descriptions. Investigators were ultimately able to recover the murder weapon and a spent bullet casing that matched the bullet casings recovered from the scene. This evidence, along with social media and cell phone evidence, was presented to the jury that convicted Phonsongkham of first-degree murder with the special circumstance of shooting from a motor vehicle, three counts of attempted murder, and one count of shooting at an occupied residence.

This latest gang-related sentencing is a troubling reminder that law enforcement officials are grappling with an increase in gang-motivated shootings and the ongoing proliferation of firearms.

"The statistics paint a very troubling picture of increasing violence spilling over between neighborhoods and ultimately terrorizing communities," DA Stephan said. "We will continue to fight for every

neighborhood to be safe from violence. We must work even harder with our law enforcement partners to reduce gang violence through prosecution and prevention."

DA Gang prosecutions increased from 368 in 2020 to 465 in 2021. In the city of San Diego alone last year, there were 17 gang homicides, a 70% increase from 10 in 2020 and a 30% increase from 2019, where there were 13 gang homicides. Gang shootings also remain high. In 2020 there were 70 and in 2021 there were 71 - a 31% increase from 2019, when there were 54 gang shootings.

In 2021, San Diego Police Department's Gang Unit recovered 78 ghost guns, up from just 25 ghost guns recovered in 2020. This is a 212% increase in one year for ghost guns recovered by gang officers in the city of San Diego alone.

The San Diego Police Department has been proactive in preventing gang violence by removing illegal firearms from known gang members. In 2020, gang officers recovered 100 illegally possessed firearms. In 2021, the figure shot up to 218, a 118% increase.

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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.