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**For Immediate Release**

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# Prison Sentence for Defendant who Killed Girlfriend's Tenant over Rent Dispute

## *75-year-old Michael Hughes Killed Mario Velasquez Cardoso*

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) said today that a 75-year-old man, who killed the tenant of his girlfriend over a property dispute in East County, has been sentenced to prison for the 2020 murder.

Michael Hughes was sentenced to 50 years-to-life in prison for the shooting death of Mario Velasquez Cardoso, 46. A jury found Hughes guilty of first-degree murder in September 2024.

“This defendant carefully planned and carried out a deliberate act of murder that mercilessly ended the life of Mario Cardoso,” DA Stephan said. “I am proud of the thorough investigation by the Sheriff’s Office that solved this murder and the dedicated prosecution by Deputy District Attorney Shane Waller and team that brought justice in this case.”

On an early morning in November 2020, Hughes drove to Cardoso’s home in Ramona. Hughes’ girlfriend, the landlord at the house, had been feuding with Cardoso’s family for months. Hughes decided to end the feud and took matters into his own hands by executing Cardoso.

In the weeks leading up to the murder, Hughes and staked out the house and removed a key surveillance camera that would have clearly captured the killer. Hughes set a trap by closing a driveway gate, forcing Cardoso to get out of his car and open it. Hughes then moved to his sniper position to wait for his victim to walk into the kill zone. When Cardoso tried opening the gate so he could go to work, Hughes fired a single shot that killed Cardoso, then calmly walked away from the scene and to his truck hidden in a nearby field. Hughes was identified as a suspect by Sheriff’s homicide detectives and contacted 16 hours later, but there was not enough evidence to arrest him at that time.

It was clear Hughes carefully planned the murder. He conducted reconnaissance on the house, tested his rifle in the days leading up to the murder, disposed of the murder weapon, wiped his computer history, and attempted to place blame on an innocent third party.

Thanks to Sheriff’s homicide detectives, led by Detective Eric Garcia, a thorough investigation including the review of tens of thousands of surveillance videos, interviews, and multiple searches proved Hughes killed Cardoso.

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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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