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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: March 10, 2017
Re: Jerome Smith
Life Prison Sentence

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that Jerome Smith, age 37, of Modesto, was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the 2015 murder of then 31-year old Valerie Rose Villegas. Deputy District Attorney Dina Petrushenko prosecuted the case on behalf of the People.

On November 14, 2015, while living in a rented motel room on South 9th Street in Modesto, Smith bludgeoned Villegas on the back of the head with a gun. He then set fire to the motel room while she was still alive. Responding firefighters found Villegas in the bathroom, where she had died from smoke inhalation. Video surveillance taken prior to the murder showed that Smith and the victim were the only two people going to and from the motel room.

On October 25, 2016 a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury convicted Smith of murder in the course of an arson, an enhancement for using a firearm, arson of an inhabited structure and being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm.

On March 6, 2017 Judge Marie Silveira sentenced Smith to life without the possibility of parole along with an additional, consecutive 10-year term for using a firearm. Judge Silveira imposed, but stayed, a prison sentence on the remaining charges as required by law.

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