



Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

Birgit Fladager
District Attorney

Assistant District Attorney
David P. Harris

Chief Deputies
Marlisa Ferreira
Jeffrey M. Laugero

Bureau of Investigation
Chief Terry L. Seese

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: February 2, 2021
Re: Miguel Angel Zavala Vigas
Convicted Killer Granted Parole after life
without parole sentence commuted by Governor

For More Information Contact:

John Goold, Public Information Liaison
Phone: (209) 525-6909

Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager announced today that convicted killer Miguel Angel Zavala Vigas, age 37, a Mexican national, is being released from prison early due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Vigas had been sentenced to serve life in state prison without the possibility of parole for murder before his sentence was commuted by then- Governor Jerry Brown to a vastly reduced term of 20 years to life.

On April 18, 2002, Regino Abundis and two friends, Juan Baragan and Jose Morales, drove to a house near Hughson to allegedly buy a car, although the evidence indicated the victims believed they would be purchasing drugs.

When they got there, Baragan and Morales went inside while victim Abundis initially remained outside. While Baragan and Morales were talking with two men inside, several other men, including Vigas, ran from concealment in various rooms exhibiting firearms. Vigas was armed with a Colt Cobra revolver. At some point, Abundis also entered the house.

Vigas and his co-defendants then hit Abundis and his companions over the head, causing them to fall to the ground. Vigas helped put tape over the three victims' eyes and around their hands and feet. When Vigas demanded to know where the money was, Abundis told him it was outside in the car. While other co-defendants moved Baragan and Morales to a bedroom, Abundis was able to break away from Vigas and run out to the backyard. Vigas shot Abundis once in the back as he was running away, killing him.

Vigas and the other men drove to an apartment complex in the nearby town of Empire, where they were caught and arrested. Deputies located two bags containing approximately \$49,000 and several firearms, including the revolver Vigas used to kill Abundis.

When interviewed by law enforcement, Vigas admitted that the group had planned to rob Abundis and his companions of their money.

Office: 832 12th Street, Suite 300 Modesto, CA 95354 Mailing: PO BOX 442 Modesto, CA 95353
Telephone: (209) 525-5550 Fax: (209) 558-4027 www.stanislaus-da.org



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On March 26, 2004, a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury convicted Vigas of first degree murder with the special circumstance of murder committed in the course of a robbery, as well as conspiracy to commit murder and two counts of robbery, along with enhancements on each count for using a gun in the crime causing death.

On May 20, 2004, Judge John Whiteside sentenced Vigas to serve life in prison without the possibility of parole along with a consecutive 25 years to life sentence for using a gun in the crime and causing the death of Abundis.

While in prison, Vigas applied to then-Governor Jerry Brown for clemency in his case. In December of 2018, Governor Jerry Brown reduced Vigas's sentence, removing life without parole and changing it to 20 years to life based upon Vigas's age at the time of the crime (18 years old) and lack of known previous criminal record. This made Vigas eligible for his first parole hearing on July 7, 2020. No other notice was provided to the District Attorney's Office nor the victim's next of kin prior to lowering Vigas's sentence.

On July 7, 2020, a state parole board determined that Vigas did not pose an unreasonable risk of danger to society and granted his release from prison. The board members pointed to Vigas's lack of known juvenile record (he came to the United States illegally at age 17 so his juvenile record in Mexico is unknown) and determined that Vigas fell under the more lenient "youthful offender" criteria since he committed the offense under the age of 26. The Board believed that Vigas had turned his life around since 2013 by making positive life choices while in prison, including dropping out of Mexican gang activities, completing alcohol and drug counseling, plus working towards completing his high school education that he had started back in 2016 before receiving the grant of clemency. The Board also found that Vigas had reasonable parole plans if he is deported back to Mexico.

On January 14, 2021, Governor Newsom decided he would not take any further action on this case. Secretary Allison of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation immediately ordered that Vigas be released on parole. Allison has the authority to order the immediate release of inmates given the emergency that currently exists in the State of California as the result of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. (Govt. Code, § 8658.)

Ordinarily, youthful offenders who commit murder and are sentenced to life in prison do not receive a parole hearing until after serving at least 25 years in prison custody. In this case, Governor Brown shortened that time even further to only 20 years. The District Attorney's Office has confirmed that there is an immigration hold on Vigas and that he should be deported to his home country of Mexico immediately upon his release.

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