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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: May 1, 2023
Re: Victor Lopez
Convicted killer denied parole

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Victor Lopez, age 44, of Modesto was found unsuitable for parole during a March 16, 2023 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings conducted at R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego. Deputy District Attorney Margot Roen appeared at the hearing on behalf of the People.

On the evening of August 24, 2003, Lopez and co-defendant Antonio Barajas, both members of the Sureno criminal street gang, were driving down a gang-infested alley in a high-crime area in Modesto when they spotted Eric Adorno, Sr., who was in the neighborhood picking up his children from a relative's house. Adorno just happened to be wearing red clothing, which Lopez took to mean Adorno belonged to a rival gang. Upon Lopez's urging, Barajas called Adorno over to their vehicle and began speaking with him. Barajas then pulled out a .22 caliber gun and shot Adorno right between the eyes, killing him almost instantly. It turned out that Adorno was not a member of any gang, but just happened to be wearing the color red.

On June 7, 2007, a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury convicted Lopez and Barajas of first-degree murder, along with an enhancement for the murder having been for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with, a criminal street gang. On July 10, 2007, Lopez was sentenced to serve 25 years to life in state prison.

During the March 16th hearing, Lopez told the Board that Adorno's death was his fault, having "pumped up" the younger Barajas just prior to the shooting, even providing Barajas with the gun used to shoot the victim. Lopez admitted to planning and instigating the killing as a way to increase Barajas' "status" within their gang and as revenge for the killing of his friend by an enemy gang member just months before. Lopez also told the Board that he became involved with gangs around the age of 14 and had participated in at least 20 to 25 gang related shootings. At the time of the killing, Lopez criminal history included a commitment to juvenile hall, the California Youth Authority, and as an adult he had already served two prior prison terms.

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Deputy District Attorney Roen asked the Board to deny parole, pointing out that, although Lopez had made significant strides in terms of education by working towards an Associate of Arts degree, he had neglected addressing the very issues that had gotten him to prison in the first place, such as his propensity for violence and controlling his anger. Ms. Roen maintained that decades of violent behavior could not easily be undone, especially given the fact that Lopez seemed to have only recently come to terms with his past. In addition, Ms. Roen pointed out that Lopez had barely served 20 of his 25 years-to-life sentence for the brutal and senseless shooting of an innocent husband and father.

Finally, Adorno's son and namesake, Eric Adorno, Jr., passionately addressed the Board, telling the panel that he had lost his hero the day his father was murdered. Despite the devastating impact of his father's death, Eric persevered, remembering a promise he had made to his dad when he was very young. Eric went on to become his high school class president and a college graduate. He was also a champion in track and field, having competed in the Junior Olympics and at the collegiate level in the NCAA. The panel expressed that they believed Eric's father would have been proud of his accomplishments and for speaking so eloquently before them.

After deliberating, the Parole Board denied Lopez parole for a period of three years. The Board felt that Lopez still needed to address his most relevant risk factors with regard to future violence, namely his anger and substance abuse. One Commissioner specifically noted Lopez's inability to control his behavior throughout his criminal past and during incarceration as an aggravating factor weighing against his release on parole. In a recent incident, Lopez hid another inmate's cell phone in his own pocket to keep the other inmate from getting into trouble. The Board found it extremely concerning that Lopez would still engage in such criminal thinking and give in to negative peer pressure given his history of gang association and loyalty. Finally, they urged Lopez to shift his focus to understanding what led to his commission of such a brazen and callous crime.

This was Lopez's first parole hearing. His next hearing will be scheduled in three years although he may request an earlier date if he can show a change in circumstances to the Board.

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