



Office of the District Attorney Stanislaus County

Jeff Laugero
District Attorney

Assistant District Attorney
Mark Zahner

Chief Deputies
Marlisa Ferreira
Wendell Emerson
Michael D. Houston

Bureau of Investigation
Chief Terry L. Seese

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: May 1, 2023
Re: Michael Romero
Convicted killer denied parole

For More Information Contact:

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

Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Michael Romero, age 50, formerly of Modesto was found unsuitable for parole during a March 9, 2023 hearing of the State Board of Parole Hearings conducted at Solano State Prison in Vacaville. Deputy District Attorney Margot Roen appeared at the hearing representing the People.

On August 4, 1995, at approximately 2:30 a.m., Romero and six of his friends had been drinking together when they decided to go to another apartment to continue partying. While crossing a street, they confronted victim Alex Bernal who had been driving in the area looking for his minor daughter. Romero yelled at Bernal for driving too fast. Bernal stopped his car and the two exchanged words. Romero then approached Bernal and stabbed him twice in the heart, killing him. When police arrested him nearby, Romero's clothing was still splattered with the victim's blood. Romero would later reveal at a 2020 parole hearing that he committed the killing because he felt challenged by the unarmed Bernal and could not back down for fear of risking his reputation in the criminal street gang to which he belonged.

On July 17, 1996, Romero was convicted by a Stanislaus County Superior Court jury of second-degree murder along with an enhancement for using a deadly weapon. Now retired Judge David VanderWall subsequently sentenced Romero to serve 16 years-to-life in state prison.

Prior to the killing, Romero's history of criminal convictions included drug sales, theft, vandalism, assault and battery, domestic violence, battery on a peace officer and assault with a deadly weapon. Romero's violent behavior continued after being sent to prison, where he assaulted other inmates, participated in a riot, promoted gang activity, and possessed gang materials. In 2015, Romero facilitated the sending of coded messages between gang members, which resulted in him being temporarily placed into segregated housing away from other inmates. In 2017, Romero again violated prison rules when he tested positive for marijuana.

In addition to his lengthy history of criminal convictions and rules violations, Romero was recently validated as a gang member in prison and had posed for a cellphone photo with several other known gang members.

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



<https://www.facebook.com/StanislausDistrictAttorney/>

In his testimony during the hearing, Romero refused to acknowledge that he was still active in a prison gang and signed an application to advance his hearing date affirming that he was “gang free.” When questioned by the Board why he would state he was “gang free” when it was obvious that he was still involved in gang activity, Romero insisted that he did not believe he was engaging in “gang activity” causing one commissioner to chide him for essentially lying to the Board.

During the hearing, prosecutor Roen requested a five-year denial, arguing that Romero still presented an unreasonable risk of danger to the community. Roen noted how the brutal stabbing of the victim over a mere exchange of words was rooted in Romero’s gang mentality. Roen also emphasized his record of rules violations while incarcerated, which showed Romero had failed to establish the lengthy period of positive rehabilitation necessary to warrant a grant of parole.

After deliberations, the Parole Board agreed and denied parole for a period of five years.

This was Romero’s third denial of parole after having stipulated to unsuitability in 2017 and 2009. His next hearing will be scheduled in five years although he may request that date be advanced if he can show a change in circumstances to the Board.

###

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



<https://www.facebook.com/StanislausDistrictAttorney/>