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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Date: August 28, 2023
Re: Ricardo Rios
First degree murder and arson convictions

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Modesto, California - Stanislaus County District Attorney Jeff Laugero announced today that Ricardo Rios, age 36, of Turlock has been convicted of first-degree murder and arson in the November 12, 2016, stabbing death of victim Pedro Solis Ruiz. Deputy District Attorney Kirk Brennan prosecuted the case for the People.

On November 12, 2016, Ricardo Rios asked his neighbor Pedro Ruiz for a ride. Rios carried with him at least two, and probably three, knives. At some point between about 6 pm and 7:30 pm, Rios repeatedly stabbed Mr. Ruiz. He stabbed Mr. Ruiz in the face first. He then pushed Mr. Ruiz from the driver's side of the SUV to the passenger side and drove Mr. Ruiz's SUV to an orchard on the outskirts of Turlock. He dragged Mr. Ruiz's body into the orchard and then drove the SUV to a different part of Turlock where he gathered leaves and papers and lit them on fire inside the front part of the SUV. He then walked home, took a shower, and hid his bloody clothes in a plastic bag in a closet of his apartment.

A Good Samaritan put out the fire with a portable fire extinguisher before it had a chance to fully consume the evidence in the SUV. Turlock Police Fire Department personnel responded and used a portable fire extinguisher to ensure the fire was fully out. They noticed a large amount of blood inside the SUV and contacted Turlock Police. Turlock Police detectives responded, photographed, documented the scene, and collected evidence. They found a bloody knife on the passenger side floorboard. Detectives responded to the victim's apartment to check on his wellbeing. While at Mr. Ruiz's apartment complex they learned about contact between Rios and Mr. Ruiz. They went to Rios' apartment to check on him and found him hiding in a closet. A Turlock Police officer also found the victim's cell phone and cell phone case, including license, in Rios bedroom closet. Rios was interviewed by a Turlock Police detective and denied knowing the whereabouts of Mr. Ruiz. He was subsequently released.

The next morning a resident who lived near the orchard found the victim's body and notified Police. Detectives secured the scene and collected and documented evidence. They subsequently went to arrest Rios at his apartment complex and found him hiding on scaffolding along one of the

buildings of the complex. He was interviewed a second time and denied having anything to do with the death of Mr. Ruiz. Detectives subsequently recovered the plastic bag with defendant's bloody clothes from Rios apartment. His shirt was later tested for DNA and the blood on the shirt was a match to the victim's DNA. The bloody knife found in the partially burnt SUV was also tested and the blood on the knife was a match to the victim and DNA on the handle of the knife was a match to Rios.

Rios was interviewed a third time by Turlock Detective Navarro and was confronted with the mounting evidence against him. He initially denied, but eventually admitted, that he stabbed Mr. Ruiz, left Mr. Ruiz's body in the orchard, drove Mr. Ruiz's SUV to a different location, and set it on fire. He claimed a combination of self-defense and mental health issues.

Rios was charged with premeditated murder along with an enhancement for personally using a knife, arson, and with having previously been convicted of first-degree residential burglary as a serious felony and a "Strike" under California's "Three Strikes" law. Upon arraignment on the charges, Rios entered pleas of not guilty and not guilty by reason of insanity.

On January 19, 2018, after hearing evidence during a preliminary hearing in the case, now retired Judge Thomas Zeff held Rios to answer on all charges and bound him over for jury trial.

On August 7th of this year, a bifurcated jury trial on the guilt phase commenced before Judge Carrie Stephens. After approximately two weeks of evidence, a Stanislaus County jury convicted Rios of premeditated murder with personal use of a knife, and arson.

After the conviction at the guilt phase, the trial then proceeded to the issue of Rios' sanity at the time of the crime. The jury heard evidence from two court appointed psychologists who evaluated Rios over two years after the murder. One gave the opinion that Rios was sane when he murdered Mr. Ruiz and set his SUV on fire, while the other gave the opinion that the defendant was insane at the time. After hearing the expert testimony and deliberating on the evidence, the jury found Rios was sane at the time he committed the crimes.

Subsequently, on August 22, 2023, Judge Stephens held a court trial regarding Rios prior strike and serious felony conviction for first degree burglary. At the conclusion of the trial, Judge Stephens found beyond a reasonable doubt that Rios had been previously convicted of first-degree burglary.

Sentencing is currently scheduled for October 23, 2023, at 8:30 a.m. in Department 4.

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