

OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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District Attorney



05-737

RELEASE NUMBER

May 22, 2024

RELEASE DATE

Deputy District Attorney Noah Abolafia-Rosenzweig

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Re: People v. Dustin Daniel Morales, Santa Barbara County Superior Court Case No. 22CR01500

On April 18, 2024, 31 year old defendant Dustin Daniel Morales, was convicted by a Santa Maria jury for violations of Penal Code sections 664/187/664(e), Attempted Murder on a Peace Officer, Penal Code section 245(d)(2), Assault with a Semiautomatic Firearm on a Peace Officer, and Penal Code section 215(a), Carjacking. The jury found true special allegations that Mr. Morales personally and intentionally discharged a firearm and that he defendant he personally used a firearm. On April 19, 2024, the Court found true additional special allegations that the defendant had suffered two prior serious felony convictions, making him subject to California's three-strikes law.

The charges arose from an incident on November 14, 2020 when a Santa Maria Police Department officer encountered the defendant in the River Ranch apartment complex around 3:30 pm. The officer recognized the defendant as a wanted individual in another case. When that officer attempted to arrest the defendant, the defendant pulled away. During the struggle which ensued, the defendant removed a semiautomatic firearm from his waistband and attempted to run from the pursuing officer. The officer gave chase. While running away, the defendant tripped and fell, facing away from the officer. After acting as if he was going to surrender, the defendant quickly turned, pointed his firearm at the officer, and fired a single shot which missed its intended target.

The pursuing officer opted not to return fire because he and the defendant were surrounded on all four sides by residential apartment buildings, and the officer had observed several passers-by in the area. In that moment, the officer opted to prioritize the safety of those around him over his own and chose not to put anyone else at risk in the event that he fired and missed. The defendant took advantage of the officer's conscientiousness and fled to the nearby O'Reilly Auto Parts parking lot across the street. Once there, he located an occupied van, pointed a gun at the driver, and demanded the keys. Both the driver and his adult son quickly exited the vehicle before the defendant drove off in it.

The defendant ditched the van a short distance away before getting a ride to Los Angeles. While in Los Angeles, the defendant got involved a car chase with the California Highway Patrol and fired multiple shots at a pursuing patrol vehicle containing two Highway Patrol officers, including one for whom it was his first day in the field. The defendant eventually crashed the car he was driving, broke into a nearby residence, and barricaded himself inside. The defendant eventually surrendered after a standoff.

On May 21, 2024, in Department 7 of the Santa Barbara Superior Court, Santa Maria Division, the defendant received the maximum sentence allowed by law for his Santa Maria crimes: 50 years, followed by 68 years to life in prison, for a total of 118 years to life. This sentence is in addition to the 75 years to life the defendant received in Los Angeles for his crimes there.

The defendant's Santa Maria crimes were investigated by the Santa Maria Police Department with Sergeant Zack Robbins as the primary investigating officer. These crimes were prosecuted by the Santa Barbara District Attorney's office and argued in court by Deputy District Attorney Noah Abolafia-Rosenzweig.

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