



Department of Justice

Carlton S. Shier, IV
United States Attorney
Eastern District of Kentucky

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CONTACT: Gabrielle Dudgeon
PHONE: (859) 685-4887
E-MAIL: gabrielle.dudgeon@usdoj.gov

Final Defendant Sentenced to Life in Prison for Role in Deadly Lexington Kidnappings

LEXINGTON, Ky. — A Lexington man, Ramon Camacho Zepeda, 54, was sentenced to life in federal prison, on Friday, by U.S. District Judge Karen Caldwell, after previously being convicted of conspiracy to commit kidnapping and interstate transportation of stolen automobiles.

According to evidence presented at trial, the charges stemmed from the kidnappings of two individuals, identified in court records as J.O. and M.A.T.O. Both victims were killed during the commission of the kidnappings. Their bodies were discovered in the trunk of a Volkswagen Jetta, on September 11, 2017, at 430 Blue Sky Parkway, in Lexington. That location was an automotive repair business owned by J.O. Two vehicles belonging to J.O. were stolen during the offenses and transported to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Evidence presented at trial revealed that Camacho Zepeda and Diaz Barraza were distributing kilogram quantities of cocaine and heroin in Lexington, and that J.O. had incurred a debt to them, based on his involvement in the drug trafficking. Testimony by a pathologist from the Kentucky Medical Examiner's Office established that J.O.'s cause of death was attributed to "chop wounds" to the head and asphyxiation. The second victim, M.A.T.O., died from asphyxiation.

Zepeda, Rosario Diaz Barraza, 32, of Phoenix, and John Carlos Betancourt, 27, of Penuelas, Puerto Rico, were convicted at trial in April 2022. Diaz Barraza was sentenced in September 2022 to 35 years in prison, followed by five years of supervised release. Betancourt was sentenced in July 2022 to 84 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release.

Additionally, Serrano-Jimenez pled guilty as charged to conspiracy to commit kidnapping in the case. On October 6, 2022, he received 168 months in prison, followed by five years of supervised release. Finally, Jose Felix Tlatenchi, of Wilkes-Barre, pled guilty to an information as an accessory after the fact to the kidnapping. He was sentenced to 120 months and a term of SR

Under federal law, Zepeda must serve 85 percent of his prison sentence. Upon his release from prison, he will be under the supervision of the U.S. Probation Office for five years.

"This sentence brings to close the prosecution of a horrific crime," said Carlton S. Shier, IV, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. "Unfortunately, in addition to the severe damage of abuse and addiction, the illegal drug trade often brings with it dramatic violence.

Here, two people brutally lost their lives, and the sentences imposed are unquestionably warranted. Bringing those responsible for this awful crime to justice involved tireless, dedicated, and remarkable work, by both our trial team and our law enforcement partners, across several states. Those who continue to engage in this dangerous trade should know that we are committed and will continue to use all the resources available to us to combat it.”

“This case perfectly illustrates the brutal nature of drug trafficking; two individuals suffered a violent end because they got mixed up with the wrong crowd,” said Special Agent in Charge J. Todd Scott, head of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Louisville Division. “Lexington is a safer community today, with one more violent offender sentenced to prison for committing these barbaric acts.”

United States Attorney Shier; DEA Special Agent in Charge Scott; Colonel Phillip Burnett, Commissioner, Kentucky State Police; and Chief Lawrence Weathers, Lexington Police Department, jointly announced the sentencing.

The lengthy investigation was conducted primarily by the Lexington Police Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Kentucky State Police. Multiple additional law enforcement agencies also provided valuable assistance, including the Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania Police Department, the Reading, Pennsylvania Police Department, the Pennsylvania State Police, the New York City Police Department, the Harlingen, Texas Police Department, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations. The United States was represented in the case by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Todd Bradbury and Francisco Villalobos.

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