

JEFFREY S. ROSELL
DISTRICT ATTORNEY



**OFFICE OF
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ**

Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street, Room 200
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454-2400
dao@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Website

<http://datinternet.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/>

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Contact: Johanna Schonfield (831) 454-2573

GANG MEMBER CONVICTED OF FIRST DEGREE MURDER

On December 8, 2017, a jury convicted Cesar Rosales, 25, of First Degree Murder. Charges in this case stemmed from a drive-by shooting on July 23, 2011 in the Target parking lot in the City of Watsonville.

Rosales, who is an active Norteño gang member, was the passenger in a car when he encountered Gustavo Diaz Zaragoza, then 19 years old, who was shopping at Target with two of his cousins. Mr. Zaragoza was an agricultural field worker who had migrated here from Oaxaca, Mexico. The defendant believed Mr. Zaragoza was a rival gang member so he shot at him five times while Mr. Zaragoza walked through the parking lot, which was extremely busy at the time. Mr. Zaragoza suffered a single gunshot wound and died at the scene. His cousin Esperanza Salazar was also shot and seriously injured. The defendant fled to Mexico shortly after the shooting. The case then went cold for nearly two years. He was apprehended by law enforcement on July 24, 2013, and has been in custody awaiting trial since that time. Mr. Rosales faces life in prison as a result of this conviction.

Prosecutors Rafael Vazquez and Johanna Schonfield prosecuted the case. About the verdict they said “We are pleased that justice has finally been served for Gustavo and Esperanza. The defendant’s behavior in this case demonstrated that he holds no value for human life. The public should rest easier knowing that a dangerous gang member will be off the streets.”

District Attorney Jeff Rosell said this about the verdict, “The District Attorney’s Office is committed to pursuing justice for victims of crime, regardless of their immigration or socio-economic status. We will use the full resources of the District Attorney’s Office to hold violent offenders accountable for their actions, no matter how many years have passed.”