



OFFICE OF THE
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VAL VERDE, KINNEY & TERRELL
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PRESS RELEASE

Freddy Villanueva, 25, of Del Rio, was sentenced on December 9th, 2021 to 40 years per a jury verdict, to run concurrently with an earlier 10-year sentence for Tampering with Evidence in the March 2019 murder of Manuel Sanchez, Jr.

The State's case proved that Villanueva demanded that the victim leave his property and then started a vicious and unprovoked attack by punching Mr. Sanchez and immediately knocking Sanchez to the ground, when the co-defendants joined in--pummeling Mr. Sanchez with their hands and feet. Mr. Sanchez did not fight back. One co-defendant attempted to hold back Villanueva and the other two attackers, but they were too determined and when they were finished Mr. Sanchez was completely unrecognizable, and never stood on his own two feet again.

The group of four then together left Villanueva's home, but all returned together at the request of Villanueva and his mother. Mr. Sanchez, still alive, was dragged on the ground from one vehicle to another while a sloppy determination was made what to do with him. The apparent motive to move the body was to avoid police presence at the Villanueva residence, inhabited by Freddy Villanueva, his mother, his sister, his sister's children, and one of the co-defendants, and where co-defendants (outside the presence of the jury) claimed to have purchased and ingested cocaine right before the attack.

The group then left the Villanueva residence again, this time in two vehicles. Villanueva directed the drivers of both vehicles where to meet to stash the evidence. Manuel Sanchez, Jr. was physically pinned into the backseat floorboard of his own vehicle, likely while incapacitated from the severe beating and alcohol in his system. The vehicle was relocated and abandoned behind a local tire shop. Mr. Sanchez was wedged under the rear seat and a tire rim was placed on top of the seat. The precise cause of death was positional asphyxiation—meaning suffocation by placement of his body. The Medical Examiner testified that death likely occurred in less than two to three minutes of being positioned in this manner.

After hiding the vehicle and body, the four co-defendants continued to drink together at one of the co-defendants' homes, and disabled and hid evidence of Mr. Sanchez's cell phone. Mr. Sanchez was found dead early the next morning by the owner of the tire shop.

Villanueva had originally entered a plea of Not Guilty to Murder and two counts of Tampering with Evidence, and a jury trial commenced on October 4, 2021. The jury found defendant Freddy Villanueva guilty of Tampering with Evidence by hiding the vehicle with Mr. Sanchez's body inside. However, the jury was unable to come to a verdict on the murder charge. Villanueva was given the maximum sentence for Tampering, which is 10 years.

The murder case was reset for December 6th, and in the intervening months, the District Attorney's Office indicted the charges with different charging language in the murder count, and added the possibility of a manslaughter charge. At the time of Freddy Villanueva's trial, all other co-defendants had pled guilty to varying ranges of charges and culpability for Mr. Sanchez's death and Tampering with Evidence, and two co-defendants agreed to testify in the December 6th trial.

District Attorney West and State's Attorney Joshua Somers presented the State's case. Mr. Somers was temporarily sworn in as an Assistant District Attorney, and his services were paid for by the Texas Attorney General's Office.

Jury selection commenced on Monday, December 6th, testimony began on Tuesday, and both sides closed by late morning on Thursday. The jury deliberated for less than three hours and returned a Guilty Verdict for Murder. Punishment phase commenced quickly and the same jury heard from the defendant himself and some of the defendant's family members. The jury assessed punishment at 40 years incarceration and a \$5000 fine.

DA STATEMENT : "The verdict in the Freddy Villanueva trial completed a long and hard fought case. We are grateful for the members of both Juries who diligently worked through these facts and the complications of the law of parties. The evidence of this heinous murder shows us that evil does exist but my office and law enforcement in this community are going to do all in our power to keep our citizens safe. The Jury's sentence of 40 years in prison assures the people of Val Verde County that Freddy Villanueva will not hurt anyone else in our community for a very long time. I am thankful for the work of our law enforcement partners and my staff and hope this verdict brings some measure of closure to the family and friends of Mr. Sanchez."