

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***For Immediate Release***

## **Federal Jury Convicts Imperial Beach Man in Fatal Stabbing of his Texas Boyfriend**

### **NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – May 2, 2017**

SAN DIEGO – On the second anniversary of his victim’s death, David Enrique Meza of Imperial Beach was convicted by a federal jury this morning of fatally stabbing his boyfriend 24 times, slashing his throat twice and dumping his body in a ravine near Rosarito Beach, Mexico in order to inherit the boyfriend’s estate.

After two weeks of trial and seven days of deliberations, the jury found Meza guilty of murdering Texas retiree Jake Clyde Merendino in the early morning hours of May 2, 2015 in Mexico. Merendino’s body was found next to the highway between Rosarito and Ensenada in an area known as Los Arenales.

Meza was convicted of both charges, including one count of Interstate or Foreign Domestic Violence Resulting in Murder and one count of Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice. U.S. District Judge Jeffrey T. Miller, who presided over the trial, set sentencing for August 7, 2017 at 9 a.m.

“David Meza took the life of a man who cared for him, lavished him with expensive gifts and who wanted to create a life with him,” said Acting U.S. Attorney Alana W. Robinson. “On this day, the second anniversary of Jake Merendino’s death, we salute the jury for delivering justice to a greedy killer who will now have to answer for his cruelty.”

“The greed, lies, and brutality of this crime were stark,” said FBI Special Agent in Charge Eric S. Birnbaum. “Every day, the FBI works tirelessly, utilizing all resources, expertise and lawful methods to find justice for victims of crime. Today’s guilty verdict brings a measure of justice for Jake Merendino.”

According to evidence presented at trial, Meza, then 23, and Merendino, then 49, met online in June 2013 and were involved in a romantic relationship thereafter. At the same time, Meza was also involved in a long-term romantic relationship with Taylor Marie Langston, a Chula Vista High graduate who was pregnant with his child at the time of the murder. Prosecutors said Meza was living a double life.

Merendino’s death came two days after he closed escrow on a luxury oceanfront condominium at Palacio del Mar in Rosarito. Meza was the beneficiary. Within days of the murder, Meza produced a handwritten will written on hotel stationery that made him sole heir to Merendino’s estate.

Langston was also charged in the indictment, returned by a grand jury in December 2015. She pleaded guilty in February to obstruction of justice for her role in the cover-up. She admitted that she and Meza agreed to lie to law enforcement agents about her and Meza’s whereabouts on the night of the murder.

According to evidence presented at trial, Meza and Merendino drove to Mexico on April 30, 2015, so Merendino could close on his \$273,000 ocean-view condominium at Palacio Del Mar in Rosarito

The next day, on May 1, Meza and Merendino returned to Baja, this time with Merendino driving his Range Rover and Meza following on a motorcycle (a 2014 Christmas gift from the victim). The new condo was not yet ready for occupancy, so they checked in to a room at Bobby’s by the Sea, a hotel nearby.

Meza went down to the lobby between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. to open a bottle of wine. Then, at about 10:30 p.m., the hotel manager heard a motorcycle leaving the hotel parking lot, and Meza was captured on a border camera entering the U.S. at about 11 p.m.

Merendino was last seen alive in the early morning hours of May 2, when he drove out of Bobby’s by the Sea parking lot, telling the hotel security guard that he needed to help a friend stranded on the road. His body was found at around 3 a.m. by Mexican police officers. At 3:57 a.m. Meza crossed into the United States on his motorcycle; Langston crossed 25 minutes later, at 4:22 a.m. in a black SUV.

At 7 p.m. the same day as the murder, Meza and Langston returned to the Bobby’s by the Sea hotel in the black SUV. Meza told hotel staff he was there to pick up his personal items from the room he had shared with Merendino.

After the slaying, one of the victim’s friends filed probate paperwork for a will Merendino drew up in 1998 in Galveston, Texas. A few days later, Meza, through his lawyers, contested the 1998 will and filed the handwritten will on letterhead from the Hercor Hotel in Chula Vista, which he claimed was executed by Merendino in December of 2014, and left Meza “everything.”

Acting U.S. Attorney Robinson thanked law enforcement counterparts from Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado - the Attorney General’s office in the state of Baja California - for their assistance in the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

She also noted that in certain circumstances, the United States has legal jurisdiction to prosecute crimes committed in other countries when U.S. citizens are victimized. “The United States will use every tool at its disposal to investigate and prosecute offenders who prey on U.S. citizens abroad.”

**DEFENDANT**

**Case Number: 15CR3175-JM**

David Enrique Meza

Age: 25

**SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

**Count One**

Interstate or Foreign Domestic Violence Resulting in Murder, in violation of Title 18 United States Code, Section 2261 (a) (1).

Maximum Penalty: Life in prison

**Count Two**

Conspiracy to Obstruct Justice, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1512 (k).

Maximum Penalty: 20 years’ imprisonment

**AGENCY**

Federal Bureau of Investigation