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NEWS RELEASE
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**DA'S OFFICE TO SEEK THE DEATH PENALTY AGAINST MAN
CHARGED WITH THE MURDERS OF TWO PALM SPRINGS POLICE OFFICERS**

RIVERSIDE – Today, Oct. 26, 2016, Riverside County District Attorney Mike Hestrin announced he will be seeking the death penalty against a man charged with the murders of two Palm Springs police officers earlier this month.

John Hernandez Felix, DOB: 7-24-90, of Palm Springs, has been charged with two counts of murder for killing Officer Jose Gilbert Vega, 63; and Officer Lesley Zerebny, 27. There are also special circumstance allegations attached to the murder charges of multiple murders, the murder of a law enforcement officer, and lying in wait. Those allegations each make Felix eligible for the death penalty. Based on the evidence in this case, it is believed that Felix, a self-admitted and known gang member, ambushed the officers who responded to the residence.

Hestrin met on Oct. 26, 2016, with family members of both Vega and Zerebny. Hestrin and experienced prosecutors in the office then met to examine and discuss the evidence in the case. Hestrin then made the decision to seek the death penalty. By law, the decision whether or not to seek the death penalty can be made only by the elected district attorney.

“This was a heinous crime involving the murders of two police officers who were gunned down simply because they were police officers,” Hestrin said. “The victims in this case were responding to a call for service and died in the line of duty protecting our community.”

Felix is also charged with three counts of attempted murder with three other Palm Springs police officers named as victims in those counts. One of the officers was wounded by gunfire, then treated at a local hospital and released. The other two officers were not hit by gunfire.

There are allegations attached to the two murder and three attempted murder counts that Felix personally used a firearm, that he possessed armor-piercing ammunition, and that he wore a body vest during the commission of a violent crime. Other counts include that Felix unlawfully possessed an assault weapon, that he unlawfully possessed a firearm after being a convicted felon, that he unlawfully possessed ammunition after being a convicted felon, and possession of stolen property – the assault weapon used in the crime.

The murders and attempted murders happened during the afternoon of Saturday, Oct. 8, 2016, in the 2700 block of Cypress Road in Palm Springs. Officers Vega and Zerebny were responding to a call of a family disturbance and were the first officers to arrive at the scene. Based on the evidence in this case, as the officers began their investigation, Felix fired multiple shots striking both Vega and Zerebny, as well as the third officer. An immediate radio call of shots fired and officers down was broadcast by officers. Officers from the Palm Springs Police Department as well as multiple other law enforcement agencies responded to the area. Felix barricaded himself inside the residence and attempts to have him surrender continued for about 12 hours before Felix finally was taken into custody outside the home.

The case, INF1601497, is being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Michelle Paradise and Deputy District Attorney Manny Bustamante.

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