



COUNTY OF YOLO
OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**State Prison Approves Early Release of Inmate Serving Life Sentence for Arson and Threats
to Rape and Kill, as a Result of Covid-19 Concerns
(Zero Bail Releases since April have resulted in over 157 new crimes in Yolo County)**

(Woodland, CA) - (July 24, 2020) -- The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) has released Santiago Cruz, 65, of Sacramento, from state prison despite Cruz's 125 years-to-life sentence. He was convicted in 1997 for criminal threats and arson and was also found to be a violent three-striker under California law. CDCR notified the District Attorney's Office on July 17, 2020, that Cruz was to be released immediately as a result of the legal authority granted to a warden of a prison to release an inmate during an emergency if the life of that inmate is endangered.

In 1994, Cruz's longtime marriage ended after he physically and verbally abused his spouse. After the divorce was finalized, his ex-wife obtained a permanent restraining order. Despite the restraining order, Cruz continued to harass his ex-wife, which resulted in him being returned to prison on a parole violation. Prior to Cruz's release, his ex-wife started a new relationship. Shortly after his release from prison, Cruz began to terrorize his ex-wife's new boyfriend and his children over a six-month period from 1995-1996. In one incident, Cruz threw a Molotov cocktail at the boyfriend's home in the middle of the night while he, his ex-wife, and two children were asleep inside the home. Cruz repeatedly threatened the new boyfriend and his daughters. During one phone call to the boyfriend's 18-year-old daughter, Cruz threatened to rape her while her father watched, kill her and then kill her father.

After deliberating for 10 minutes, the jury convicted Cruz of three counts of criminal threats, attempted arson and arson. The jury also found that Cruz had been previously convicted of two prior strikes for robbery and armed robbery making him a "Three Striker." On October 23, 1997, the court sentenced Cruz to 125 years-to-life.

Cruz's release is one of the latest efforts made by the CDCR to reduce its inmate population. Since February 2020, CDCR has released approximately 10,000 inmates early. On July 10, 2020, CDCR officials announced additional action that would release another 8,000 inmates by the end of August 2020. CDCR offered no explanation for Cruz's early release in documents sent to the District Attorney. Additionally, the release was ordered with little warning and no opportunity for input or opposition by the victims or the District Attorney's Office. Cruz's ex-wife provided a statement to the District Attorney's Office. She is "flabbergasted" by his

release and says that she lives in fear, her three children and friends are concerned for her, and that “everyone but the ‘system’ is concerned.” With Cruz’s release she feels she “is now the one in prison.” Cruz’s ex-wife further stated, “A dangerous person is being released into society again and it’s not fair to her, her family and society in general.” She also expressed frustration at the lack of transparency used to determine the release of prisoners and wants to know why victims’ rights are not being taken into consideration. Under California law, victims have a Constitutional right to be heard at all major stages of a criminal proceeding.

Victims are encouraged to register or update their registered information with CDCR in order to ensure that CDCR fulfills its legal duty to notify victims of an early release. See <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/victim-services/application/>. Additionally, victims can track inmate releases at <https://inmatelocator.cdcr.ca.gov/>. Victims are also encouraged to call the District Attorney’s Victim Services Unit for assistance.

More information about CDCR’s early release plans can be found at the FAQ page. <https://www.cdcr.ca.gov/covid19/frequently-asked-questions-for-plan-on-expedited-release-and-increased-physical-space-within-state-prisons/>

The CDCR early releases are just one of the impacts to the criminal justice system as a result of the pandemic. In April, the California Judicial Council adopted a \$0 Statewide Emergency Bail Schedule. Although rescinded in June by the Judicial Council, the Yolo County Superior Court continues to use the same \$0 bail schedule.

The District Attorneys’ Office has been tracking arrestees in Yolo County who have been released on \$0 bail as a result of the Emergency Bail Schedule. Since April 13, 2020, 213 individuals have been arrested and released on zero bail on over 235 occasions, with some benefiting from \$0 bail release on multiple occasions. The individuals who have reoffended since their release on zero bail in Yolo County have committed over 157 new crimes, in Yolo County alone. Those new crimes include 76 felonies and 81 misdemeanors, including crimes such as Assault with a Deadly Weapon and/or Likely to Produce Great Bodily Injury (8 new victims), Robbery (4 new victims), Burglary (10 new victims) felony domestic violence, possession of an assault weapon, gang crimes and dozens of other new felony and misdemeanor crimes.

Zero Bail Releases/New Crimes Summary in Yolo County Only

- 213 individuals have been released a total of 235 times on Zero Dollar Bail
- 157 new crimes committed by individuals after being released on Zero Dollar Bail
- 76 new felonies committed by individuals released on Zero Dollar Bail
- 81 new misdemeanors committed by individuals released on Zero Dollar Bail
- 55 individuals have been rearrested a total of 85 times after being released on Zero Dollar Bail
- Individuals that were released on Zero Dollar Bail have also been arrested on 31 bench warrants / outside agency warrants since their release

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