



COUNTY OF FRESNO

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Driver Sentenced to 17 Years in Prison for DUI Crash that Killed Father and Son

Today, January 13, 2023, Jovan Cortez (24, of Fresno) was sentenced to 17 years in state prison for his role as the driver in a fatal DUI crash that occurred on May 1, 2021. The sentence against Cortez was handed down by the court following his conviction for two counts of gross vehicular manslaughter while impaired and an additional charge of driving under the influence causing injury. His conviction included enhancements for personally inflicting great bodily injury upon two adults and three children, as well as other injuries to two additional children. Cortez was also convicted of one count of child endangerment.

Cortez's convictions stemmed from a collision that occurred during the evening hours of May 1, 2021. Deputies from the Fresno Sheriff's Office were called to a report of a domestic disturbance at the defendant's residence. Upon arriving, Deputies were advised that the defendant had left the location with his 1-year-old daughter. While Deputies were investigating the disturbance, the defendant returned to the area of his residence, and upon driving past the Deputies, fled the area in his pickup truck.

While driving away from the area, the defendant travelled northbound on North Avenue in his Ram 1500 pickup truck. At the intersection with Jensen Avenue, the defendant failed to stop at a stop sign at an estimated speed of 55 miles per hour and broadsided a Cadillac Escalade that was proceeding through the intersection. Inside of that Escalade was a family of two adults and four children. Two occupants of the Escalade were killed in the crash—the driver Jose Castillo, and one of his twin 7-year old sons. The mother and her 4-, 7-, and 12-year-old children were also injured in the collision and were transported to area hospitals. Also injured in the collision was the defendant's 1-year-old daughter, who was heroically rescued from the defendant's burning vehicle by responding Deputies from the Fresno Sheriff's Department.

Following a thorough investigation by the California Highway Patrol, it was determined that the defendant was driving under the influence of alcohol at the time of the crash.

The case was successfully prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Steven Ueltzen with the Alcohol and Drug Impaired Driver Vertical Prosecution Unit. Funding for that unit has been provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

[21-10822 DUI]