



**CARVER COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
JUSTICE CENTER, GOVERNMENT CENTER
604 EAST FOURTH STREET, CHASKA, MN 55318-1413
PHONE: 952-361-1400**

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Mark Metz

APPELLATE COURTS AFFIRM MURDER SENTENCE OF CO- DEFENDANT IN KILLING OF EARL OLANDER

Carver County Attorney Mark Metz announced that on September 18, 2018, the Minnesota Supreme Court denied a Petition for Review filed by Edson Benitez Dominguez who challenged his 37-year murder sentence for aiding and abetting the 2015 murder of Earl Olander.

On April 9, 2015, Reinol Vergara and Benitez Dominguez beat, robbed and murdered Earl Olander, age 90, after breaking into his San Francisco Township home. Vergara had been a house painter at Olander's home and knew that Olander was wealthy. After beating Olander with a shotgun that night, the men left Olander bleeding on his living room floor with his hands bound behind his back with duct tape. One of Olander's neighbors found Olander dead on the floor two days later. Investigators determined that Olander died from blunt force injuries inflicted during the beating. The murder went unsolved for approximately one month until a man found a discarded bible belonging to Olander that Benitez Dominguez left behind in a St. Paul apartment.

The Carver County Attorney's Office obtained murder convictions for both Vergara and Benitez Dominguez. On April 21, 2016, Vergara plead guilty to aiding and abetting intentional murder and on May 6, 2016, Benitez Dominguez plead guilty to the murder. Both men were sentenced on May 6, 2016, to a 37 year prison sentence.

Almost one year later, on April 27, 2017, Benitez Dominguez challenged his sentence through a Post-Conviction Relief Motion in Carver County District Court. District Court Judge Michael Wentzell considered the motion and ruled against Benitez Dominguez. Benitez Dominguez appealed Judge Wentzell's ruling to the Minnesota Court of Appeals which reviewed and affirmed Judge Wentzell's decision. Benitez Dominguez then brought a Petition for Review to the Minnesota Supreme Court, challenging the Court of Appeals' decision. On September 18, 2018, the Minnesota Supreme Court denied Benitez Dominguez's Petition for Relief, essentially affirming the earlier rulings of Judge Wentzell and the Court of Appeals.

Vergara also challenged his sentence with a Post-Conviction Relief Motion. Judge Wentzell denied that motion on August 31, 2018.

Assistant Carver County Attorney Kevin Hill and First Assistant County Attorney Dave Hunt handled Benitez Dominguez's post-conviction motions and appeals.

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