



COUNTY OF FRESNO

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 30th, 2022

Governor Newsom Blocks the Release of Perla Vazquez

At the urging of the Fresno County District Attorney's Office and the family of the late Frank Winslow, Governor Gavin Newsom blocked the parole release of Perla Vazquez.

The Governor's reversal follows a March 30, 2022, decision by the Board of Parole Hearing that ruled in favor of granting parole of inmate Vazquez. Governor Newsom had 150 days from the hearing to reverse that decision and did so with a written reversal dated August 26, 2022. The Governor's reversal was made available to the Fresno County District Attorney's Office on August 29, 2022.

In 2011, Inmate Perla Vazquez drove while intoxicated, sped on the highway, and struck the vehicle driven by Mr. Winslow, killing him. She was convicted at jury trial of second-degree murder in 2014 and sentenced to a term of 15-years-to-life. In June of 2021, she became eligible for parole.

District Attorney Smittcamp expresses her appreciation to Governor Newsom for considering the concerns expressed by the family of Frank Winslow in making this very important decision. Governor Newsom's written reversal is included with this news release.

The Media may email FCDAMedia@fresnocountyca.gov with any inquiries.

INDETERMINATE SENTENCE PAROLE RELEASE REVIEW
(Penal Code Section 3041.2)

PERLA VAZQUEZ, WF-0169
Second Degree Murder

AFFIRM: _____

MODIFY: _____

REVERSE: _____ **X** _____

STATEMENT OF FACTS

In 2011, Perla Vazquez drove while intoxicated, sped on the highway and struck the victim's car, killing him. She was convicted of second degree murder, sentenced to a term of 15-years-to-life, and has been incarcerated for 10 years.

DECISION

I acknowledge that Ms. Vazquez faced adverse childhood experiences that shaped her life and choices, and that she committed this crime when she was 24 years old. In making this decision, I gave great weight to all of the factors relevant to Ms. Vazquez's diminished culpability as a youthful offender, including her impulsivity, inability to anticipate the consequences of her actions, and other hallmark features of youth. I carefully examined the record for evidence demonstrating Ms. Vazquez 's increased maturity and rehabilitation since the crime.

Ms. Vazquez has made efforts to improve herself in prison. She has participated in extensive self-help programming including as a facilitator, is enrolled in college courses, and works as a certified peer mentor. She founded a drunk driving prevention self-help group. I have given great weight to her subsequent growth in prison during my consideration of her suitability for parole. However, these factors are outweighed by negative factors that demonstrate she remains unsuitable for parole at this time.

Ms. Vazquez has a long history of alcohol abuse that began when she was 11 years old. By high school she reports that she was drinking and using marijuana daily. She told the evaluating psychologist, "I fell in love with alcohol and what it did for me, it numbed me. I was looking for pure oblivion." Ms. Vazquez's substance use escalated, and she started using methamphetamine and other drugs. She sustained several arrests and convictions for drunk driving-related

offenses. She repeatedly failed to complete the terms of her probation. A judge ordered Ms. Vazquez to participate in an 18-month outpatient DUI program, but she completed only two months of the program before she quit. Her driver's license was suspended at the time of the life crime. Ms. Vazquez continued to use substances for several years into her incarceration. The psychologist diagnosed Ms. Vazquez with alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine, and prescription medication use disorders, all in sustained remission in the controlled environment of prison. Ms. Vazquez reports maintaining sobriety since 2014.

There is a close nexus between Ms. Vazquez's substance use and history of unhealthy relationships. She experienced violence and coercive control by her partners, which triggered her drinking. At her parole hearing, she told the commissioners that relationships are her "biggest issue," and when she experienced relational instability, she "immediately went to drinking." She told the Board that, in almost every instance when police stopped her for drunk driving, she was driving to see her boyfriend and disregarded that she was not sober enough to drive. In short, her relationship took precedence over the risks posed by driving drunk.

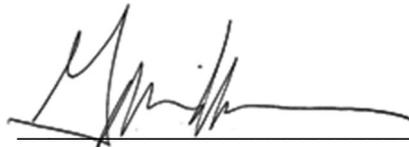
Ms. Vazquez has maintained sobriety over the last eight years, and has demonstrated candor and developing insight, both positive signs of her rehabilitative progress. I commend Ms. Vazquez and encourage her to continue on this positive path. I have concluded, however, that Ms. Vazquez must do additional work to shore up these gains before she can be safely released.

The psychologist warned that, "Ms. Vazquez achieved and maintained sobriety in prison, but that does not translate to sobriety in a less controlled and structured environment." The psychologist flagged that Ms. Vazquez must "remain vigilant" in order to avoid relapse in the face of the stressors she will face on parole, including "relationships, finances, and parole obligations." I encourage Ms. Vazquez to focus on deepening her understanding of her triggers for substance use and honing the skills she will need to manage them. I also encourage Ms. Vazquez to continue working to understand and mitigate her risk factor for unstable relationships and develop strategies for establishing and maintaining healthy relationships in the community.

CONCLUSION

I have considered the evidence in the record that is relevant to whether Ms. Vazquez is currently dangerous. When considered as a whole, I find the evidence shows that she currently poses an unreasonable danger to society if released from prison at this time. I therefore reverse the decision to parole Ms. Vazquez.

Decision Date:
August 26, 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', is written over a horizontal line.

GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor, State of California