

Commonwealth's Attorney
Colin D. Stolle

Chief Deputies
Susan G. Hooks
Scott M. Lang



**OFFICE OF THE COMMONWEALTH'S ATTORNEY
CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH**

2425 Nimmo Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA 23456-9050

(757) 385-4401
FAX (757) 385-1288
TDD: 711
www.vbgov.com/oca

Deputies
Wendy Alexander
Tabitha B. Anderson
Sara R. Chandler
Patrick J. Connolly
Michael D. Defricke
Jancee D. Joslin
Paul J. Powers

**NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 21, 2021**

MEDIA CONTACT:
Macie Allen (757) 385-8545
mpallen@vbgov.com

**Commonwealth v. Jose Morales-Arriola
21 Years to Serve for Role in MS-13 Murder**

Virginia Beach, Va. – Colin D. Stolle, Commonwealth's Attorney for the city of Virginia Beach, announced today that Jose Morales-Arriola, age 24, pled guilty in Circuit Court to Participation in Criminal Act for Benefit of or at the Direction of Gang MS-13 and Murder-2nd Degree. Circuit Court Judge Kevin M. Duffan sentenced Morales-Arriola to forty (40) years in prison with nineteen (19) years suspended for Murder-2nd Degree and ten (10) years in prison with five (5) years suspended for Participation in Criminal Act for Benefit of or at the Direction of Gang MS-13, to run concurrently, leaving twenty-one (21) years to serve.

The Commonwealth's evidence proved that on July 6, 2018, two men were kayaking on Lake Smith around 10 a.m. when they observed an unresponsive male slumped over in a wooded area of the shoreline. They called police, who arrived on scene along with the medical examiner and determined the male to be deceased with a gunshot wound to the back of the head. There was no weapon found at the scene and the victim did not have identification. He was later identified as Jairo Guardado.

An extensive investigation including video surveillance, cell phone data, and witness interviews ultimately indicated that the murder was related to MS-13 gang activity. MS-13 is a transnational criminal street gang with international membership. Morales-Arriola, Willian Rodriguez, Melvin Edgardo Molina-Ramos, Cristian Granados-Nunez and another MS-13 gang member were involved in the murder of Guardado because they believed he was involved with a rival gang; however, investigators did not find evidence to support that. Molina-Ramos, the most senior member of MS-13, ordered Guardado's murder. Guardado was lured to the lake under the guise of fishing, drinking beer, and smoking marijuana. Morales-Arriola shot Guardado once in the

June 21, 2022

Page 2

back of the head. Rodriguez then took a picture of Guardado as evidence of the killing. Morales-Arriola and his co-defendants were threatened with death by Molinda-Ramos if they failed or if they spoke of the homicide.

The Virginia Beach Police Department Homicide Unit, Norfolk Police Department Detective Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation Tidewater Violent Crimes Task Force, Federal Bureau of Investigation Norfolk Field Office, and Fairfax County Police Department Gang Investigations Unit assisted with the investigation and prosecution of this case.

Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Tabitha Anderson prosecuted this case. Please contact Macie Allen if additional information is desired.

###