



CAMERON COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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Former Santa Rosa Coach Sentenced in Student Sex Abuse Case

Brownsville, TX —Monday, September 27, 2021—This morning, prior to jury selection in the case of a former Santa Rosa ISD educator and coach, Josue Cepeda, 37, entered a guilty plea for his role in an inappropriate relationship with a student. Josue Cepeda pled guilty in the 103rd District Court to one count of Trafficking of Persons (1st Degree Felony), six counts of Sexual Assault of a Child (2nd Degree Felonies), and one count of Improper Relationship Between an Educator and Student (2nd Degree Felony). Cepeda, who also formerly worked in law enforcement, was subsequently sentenced to 19 years in prison, in addition they will be required to register as a sex offender for the remainder of his life and will have to abide by a lifetime protective order for the victim. During the course of a multiagency law enforcement investigation, evidence was found that Cepeda and the victim, a student at Santa Rosa High School at the time, were in contact via text message as early as 2018 when she was a student in his class. Contact ceased in May of 2018 and resumed late January of 2019, when within days, inappropriate messaging resulted in physical sexual contact which was corroborated by various witnesses and cell phone data.

The case stems back to May 2018, when allegations of Cepeda engaging in an inappropriate relationship with the student was first reported to Santa Rosa ISD officials. At that time, the administration failed to properly investigate and law enforcement was not notified. In February 2019, new tips from concerned citizens came into the Homeland Security Investigations Rio Grande Valley Child Exploitation Task Force about Cepeda and his victim. The interim Superintendent placed Cepeda on administrative leave at that time. A lengthy law enforcement investigation ensued that had the complete support of incoming Santa Rosa ISD Superintendent Dr. Angela Gonzalez. Gonzalez's cooperation was instrumental in obtaining new facts and witness statements, and in today's verdict. "Dr. Gonzalez was targeted by the administrative personnel, school board members, and the community for cooperating with law enforcement and the District Attorney. These folks know who they are. If not for Dr.

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Gonzalez’s courage and commitment to the children of Santa Rosa, today’s plea would not have happened,” said Cameron County District Attorney Luis V. Saenz.

Child Abuse Unit Supervisor Brandy Bailey and Melanie Palomo-Zamora prosecuted for the State of Texas. Their team included investigators Eduardo “Jimmy” Limon, Sergio Padilla and Alfredo Rodriguez, HIDTA Analyst Marla Flores, paralegal Norma Jaramillo, victim advocate Michael Reyes and ADA Eva De La Fuente.

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