



Kevin Petroff
FIRST ASSISTANT

Johnny Freeze
CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

**Zonia
Wiltturner-Smith**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER

Contact:
Brent Haynes
ASSISTANT CRIMINAL
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Email:
brent.haynes(at)
galveston.co.tx.us

Direct:
409-770-6280

Main:
409-766-2355

Fax:
409-766-2290

Mother of “Little Jacob” Sentenced to Life in Prison By Galveston County Jury

GALVESTON – The mother of a four-year old boy whose body was found on a beach in Galveston has been sentenced to life in prison by a Galveston County jury.

Rebecca Suzanne Rivera, mother of the boy called “Little Jacob” before his identity was determined, was convicted of injury to a child by omission causing serious bodily injury, a first degree felony, after a seven day trial that concluded February 4.

“Little Jacob’s” body was discovered on East Beach in Galveston in October 2017. After a six-month investigation, including DNA analysis by the FBI, law enforcement officers were able to determine the identity of the child and his mother. “Little Jacob” was Jayden Alexander Lopez.

Trial evidence showed that Rivera and her girlfriend brought Jayden’s body to Galveston after he died in Houston. Rivera and her girlfriend dumped his body in the water off East Beach, where it was discovered a day later.

Jayden’s body showed evidence of torture, including scarring from being beaten with hangers, cigarette burns all over his back, ligature marks on his wrists and ankles, and numerous blunt force trauma injuries, according to Dr. Erin Barnhart, Galveston County’s Medical Examiner, and Dr. Patricia Beach of the University of Texas Medical Branch Pediatrics Division. Jayden also suffered from severe malnutrition, pneumonia, and was emaciated, according to the physicians. The Medical Examiner was not able to testify to a specific cause of death.

Rivera admitted in a pre-trial statement that was admitted in evidence that she hit her child with anything she could find when she became frustrated with her girlfriend, Dania Amezcuita Gomez. Gomez, who is also charged with injury to a child, testified against Rivera as part of a plea deal.

The case was prosecuted by Chief Assistant District Attorney Matt Shawhan and Assistant District Attorney Dulce Salazar of the Special Victims Unit of the Galveston County Criminal District Attorney’s Office. The jury found Rivera guilty after deliberating for approximately one hour.

Chief ADA Shawhan told the jury before punishment “you can’t rehabilitate evil.” ADA Salazar argued “this defendant earned every day of a life sentence.” The jury returned a verdict for a life sentence after deliberating again for approximately one hour. Under Texas law, Rivera will be eligible for parole after serving 30 years in prison.

The Galveston County Criminal District Attorney commends the work of the Galveston Police Department and the FBI that led to this successful prosecution. GPD Detective Jeff Banks and FBI Special Agent Rick Martinez were the lead investigators.

Cause number 18-CR-2442, 10th District Court, Honorable Kerry Neves, presiding.