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TODD SPITZER

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PRESS RELEASE

Date: September 10, 2024
Case #: 24NF2358

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**Mother Who Advocated for Stricter DUI Laws after Two Young Sons Killed by Drunk Driver
Charged with Involuntary Manslaughter, Child Abuse for Allowing Three-Year-old Daughter to
Die while Locked in a Vehicle in Extreme Heat while Mother was Severely Intoxicated**

SANTA ANA, Calif. – A mother who advocated for stricter DUI laws after her two young sons were run over and killed by a drunk driver while sleeping in their tent during a 2012 camping trip has been charged with involuntary manslaughter and child abuse for allowing her three-year-old daughter to die while locked in a vehicle in extreme heat while severely intoxicated.

The little girl's mother had a blood alcohol content of nearly four times the legal limit when she was taken to the hospital after being found passed out in her vehicle along with her deceased toddler while parked near their Anaheim apartment Friday afternoon. Outdoor temperatures at the time were more than 104 degrees.

Sandra Hernandez-Cazares, 42, of Anaheim, has been charged with one felony count of involuntary manslaughter and one felony count of child abuse causing great bodily injury. She faces a maximum sentence of 12 years if convicted on all charges. She is currently being held in lieu of \$150,000 bail.

On Friday, September 6, 2024, family members began looking for Hernandez-Cazares after staff from her 5-year-old son's elementary school called other family members to report that no one came to pick him up from kindergarten.

Family members broke out the window of a white Ford Expedition parked in front of the Anaheim apartment where Hernandez-Cazares was living with her two children after finding Hernandez-Cazares unconscious inside her with her three-year-old daughter Ily Ruiz.

Despite efforts by family members and paramedics to resuscitate the toddler, she was pronounced dead. Doctors estimate that little girl had been dead for several hours before she was discovered inside the locked car in extreme temperatures with her mother.

After Hernandez-Cazares' 5-year-old and 9-year-old sons were killed by a drunk driver who ran over the boys as they were sleeping in a tent at a South Dakota campground during a family vacation in 2012, Hernandez-Cazares and her husband Juan Ruiz lobbied the North Dakota legislature for stronger penalties for driving under the influence.

On Friday, Anaheim police officers found empty alcohol bottles in the vehicle and Hernandez-Cazares' blood alcohol level was at a .30 after being taken to the hospital. Hernandez-Cazares' five-year-old son is currently being cared for by relatives.

"The unimaginable pain of having your 5-year-old and 9-year-old sons killed by a drunk driver is something from which you can never recover," said Orange County District Attorney Todd Spitzer. "Anyone who has suffered such a devastating tragedy knows the ripple effects of grief may be able to be hidden, but the heartbreak of losing your children will never go away. A mother who was robbed of the chance to see two of her sons grow up because of the selfish decision of a stranger will have to live with the fact she will never get to see her little girl grow up because of the choices she made."

Deputy District Attorney Tina Hanley of the Family Protection Unit is prosecuting this case.

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