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PRESS RELEASE

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Judge Dismisses Charges against Juvenile for 2021 Homicide and Shooting at Teichert Ponds

A Butte County Juvenile Court judge today dismissed all charges against the now 17-year-old juvenile suspect accused of shooting two homeless men at the Chico Teichert Ponds in September of 2021 that killed one of the victims. The dismissal came after three days of testimony last week and this week during the juvenile's court trial on charges of murder and assault with a firearm.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said prosecutors presented testimony from 15 witnesses, surveillance videos, social media videos, diagrams, expert testimony, and photographs at the trial. The evidence showed that a group of minors was drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana at a party east of Teichert Ponds during the early morning hours of September 4, 2021 around 2:30 a.m. Four of the minors then left that group and walked along the bike trail through Teichert Ponds heading towards the juvenile suspect's home. Testimony and video evidence indicated the four juveniles were associated with a local criminal street gang. The suspect juvenile was armed with a semi-automatic handgun with a green laser attachment.

Testimony was heard from numerous witnesses that a green laser flashed through the homeless encampment next to the bike trail and yelling by the juveniles was heard on that trail. There was some evidence there was at least one more green laser flashing in the area. There was conflicting evidence about what was being said by the juveniles on the trail.

In response to the lasers and yelling, testimony revealed that between four to eight individuals exited a covered part of the homeless encampment where they admitted they had been eating, smoking drugs, and drinking alcohol to see what was going on. A back-and-forth ensued between the members of the homeless encampment and the four minors on the bike trail.

Evidence was presented that the individuals in the homeless encampment were acting aggressively during the altercation. There were also statements from witnesses that suggested individuals in the homeless encampment were armed with a gun and the gun was pointed at the juveniles. It was argued by the defense that the juveniles were therefore only acting in response to the perceived threat against their lives.

Nonetheless, after a short period, a series of gunshots were fired, striking two victims at the

homeless camp. One of the victims was struck in the abdomen causing his rapid death, while the second victim was struck once in the leg and once in the pelvis but he survived his injuries.

Eight spent bullet casings of the same caliber were ultimately found on the trail. Of significance, prosecutors noted one unspent round was found on the trail leading up to the homeless encampment suggesting a round was chambered before the argument between the juveniles and homeless ever began.

There were no surveillance cameras at the pond area, but surveillance video from cameras some blocks away was presented that showed the four juveniles leaving the general area, including the suspect juvenile carrying a semi-automatic handgun. Ramsey said Chico Police used those videos in their initial investigation to identify the juveniles, which led to the arrest of the suspect juvenile 13 days later. No gun was ever recovered.

Prosecutors argued after the presentation of their case that there was sufficient evidence to believe the juveniles were looking for trouble that night and when they found it, the juvenile suspect opened fire with his handgun.

However, the judge ruled at the end of the prosecution case that there was insufficient evidence to overcome a claim of self-defense and dismissed the case before the presentation of any defense evidence.

Ramsey noted in order to find the juvenile suspect guilty of murder; the law requires the prosecution to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the juvenile did not act in self-defense. The prosecution is required to disprove the defense that the juvenile was in reasonable fear for his life or the lives of others.

The judge stated inconsistencies between the testimonies of the various witnesses ultimately caused the judge to conclude that insufficient evidence had been presented to sustain the charges against the juvenile and overcome the argument of self-defense.

The judge however did find the suspect juvenile was in violation of a previous grant of probation from April of 2021 for an October 2020 attempted robbery. The judge found the juvenile in violation by his consuming alcohol, being out past curfew, associating with gang members, and being in illegal possession of a firearm on this occasion. The juvenile is currently pending sentencing on October 26, 2022, for the violation of his probation.