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PRESS RELEASE

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CHICO MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR VANDALISM, HATE CRIMES

Yesterday, in Butte County Superior Court, a Chico man was sentenced to prison for several convictions of vandalism and hate crimes within the city of Chico.

On October 21, 2020, **Thomas Bona**, 35, pled no contest in Butte County Superior Court to felony vandalism with a hate crime allegation and four additional misdemeanor counts of vandalism with two counts of violating civil rights. On Wednesday, Bona was sentenced to the upper term of six years state prison for those crimes.

His felony conviction stemmed from a June 12, 2019 incident where Bona approached a man in a vehicle yelling racial slurs at the man and kicking the driver's side of the man's vehicle leaving a large dent. Using a knife, Bona then carved a white supremacy symbol into the hood of the vehicle.

His misdemeanor convictions involved two incidents from April 9, 2019 when Bona was seen on surveillance at a minority-owned Chico gas station using a black marker to mark walls and a door with white power statements. A black marker was found on Bona when arrested. On the same day, Bona broke a window of a local minority-owned food truck when his payment card was refused. And on May 6, 2019, he was seen marking a wall of a Chico building on Orange Street with symbols of unknown meaning.

On April 8, 2020, upon request of his defense attorney and over the objection of the prosecutor, a local judge released Bona from custody. On June 2, 2020, Bona was recorded marking multiple white supremacy symbols (swastikas) at the Chico City Plaza, where numerous people had gathered in response to the death of George Floyd. Bona was arrested a few days later and returned to custody.

Throughout the pendency of his cases, Bona's mental health had been an issue. Bona was twice declared incompetent to stand trial and proceedings were suspended. At Wednesday's sentencing, when sentencing Bona to the upper term, Judge Kimberly Merrifield acknowledged Bona's mental health issues, but also noted Bona posed a significant risk to public safety if not imprisoned.

The judge noted that Bona will have access to mental health services while serving his prison term and would be subject to earlier release if he actively engages with treatment.

