



ERIK NASARENKO
VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY
NEWS RELEASE



Follow us @VenturaCountyDA
vcdistrictattorney.com

Contact: Joey Buttitta
Title: Communications Manager/PIO
Phone: (805) 767-3400
Email: Joey.Buttitta@ventura.org

Approved: SW
Date: May 16, 2024
Release No.: 24-051

San Diego Man Pleads Guilty to Forcible Sex Crimes Against Sister

VENTURA, Calif. – The Ventura County District Attorney’s Office announced today that Stephen Delacruz (DOB 01/13/87), of San Diego, pled guilty on May 14, 2024, to eight felonies including three counts of forcible rape, three counts of forcible oral copulation, and two counts of sexual penetration by a foreign object. Delacruz also admitted to the special allegations that the victim was under 18 years of age.

“Samantha was incredibly brave, courageous and just never gave up,” said District Attorney Erik Nasarenko, who prosecuted the case. “Despite multiple setbacks and delays, she kept fighting for justice and to have her voice heard in court. Because of her determination to see her brother held accountable for these egregious crimes, the legal process did ultimately work.”

The plea brings an end to a complicated legal process that began in 2019 when the victim walked into the Oxnard Police Department to report that she had been raped by her brother when she was eight years old.

Nearly six years apart in age, the District Attorney’s office initially filed charges in juvenile court alleging Delacruz was 14 and 15 at the time of the crimes. Then senior prosecutor Erik Nasarenko sought to have the case transferred from juvenile court to adult court, arguing that the crimes involved significant sophistication and planning and were especially violent and severe. Delacruz isolated the victim in their Oxnard house and threatened to kill her if she ever disclosed the crimes, often displaying a knife prior to the sexual assaults, which occurred in 2001 and 2002.

The juvenile court judge agreed with the prosecutor and transferred the case. However, in 2022, the state legislature amended the criteria that California juvenile court judges had to consider when weighing whether to transfer a case to adult court. The new criteria required courts to determine “by clear and convincing evidence that the minor is not amenable to rehabilitation” through the juvenile court. This change in the law entitled the defendant to another transfer hearing, which

meant the case had to be returned to juvenile court and Samantha would have to endure the same process yet again. In 2023, a different Ventura County Superior Court judge, applying the new standard, found the defendant fit for transfer to adult court, stating that the “allegations were horrendous.”

With the case now set to return to adult court, the defendant exercised his right to appeal the transfer order to the California Court of Appeal, resulting in another delay for Samantha. In November 2023, the California Court of Appeal affirmed the transfer order and returned the case to adult court for jury trial. On Tuesday, May 14, 2024, Delacruz pled guilty to three counts of rape, three counts of forcible oral copulation and two counts of digital penetration. He also waived his appellate rights at the time of the plea, meaning he is barred from further appeals in this case.

“This is a day that I thought may never come, and I am thankful that this violent criminal will no longer be a threat to our community,” said Samantha. “I owe a debt of gratitude to District Attorney Nasarenko for staying on the case and for his unrelenting support in my fight for justice. I also want to express my gratitude to the entire DA’s office, who work so hard to bring justice to victims like me and to protect our county.”

Delacruz is scheduled to be sentenced on June 27, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. in courtroom 24 of the Ventura County Superior Court. All the charges are considered violent felonies under California law, and the District Attorney intends to ask the judge for a 30-year state prison commitment.

Case: 2020016896

Defendant Information:

Stephen Delacruz (DOB 01/13/87)
San Diego

Charges:

- (3 counts) PC 261(a)(2) – Forcible rape
- (3 counts) PC 287(c)(2)(a) – Forcible oral copulation
- (2 counts) 289(a)(1) – Sexual penetration by foreign object

Special Allegations

- PC 801.1(a) – Victim under 18 years of age

