



ERIK NASARENKO

VENTURA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

NEWS RELEASE



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Approved: SW
Date: June 17, 2025
Release No.: 25-081

Santa Paula Man Faces State Prison for Beating Sick Sea Lion

VENTURA, Calif. – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that Christopher Hurtado (DOB 03/30/93), of Santa Paula, pled guilty on June 16, 2025, to two felony counts related to the beating of a sea lion suffering on a Ventura beach from recent algae blooms. Hurtado changed his plea just ahead of trial, admitting to one count of cruelty to an animal and possession of a hard drug. He also admitted to all special allegations and aggravating factors including a prior strike and that the sea lion was vulnerable.

"Ventura County was outraged by the violence this defendant inflicted on a defenseless animal," District Attorney Nasarenko said. "The nature of this senseless attack shocked our conscience and called for aggressive prosecution."

On March 4, 2025, a woman walking on the beach with her dog called 911 after seeing a sea lion stuck on the rocks in front of the Ventura Promenade. Ventura Police Department dispatchers were able to locate the sea lion using live surveillance cameras near the Ventura Pier. As dispatchers watched the cameras, Hurtado was seen walking up to the sick sea lion and kicking it in the head. After the kick, Hurtado sat down for a while on the rocks before grabbing a four-foot piece of driftwood, raising it over his head and hitting the sea lion twice in the body. Ventura Police officers arrived at the scene and took Hurtado into custody. Officers found .06 grams of methamphetamine in Hurtado's pants pocket.

On June 9, 2025, the Channel Island Marine and Wildlife Institute contacted prosecutors and informed them that the sea lion was taken into their care and later euthanized due to suffering from domoic acid poisoning from algae bloom.

Deputy District Attorney Patrick Benjamin, a member of the Ventura County District Attorney's Office General Trials Unit, prosecuted the case.

“Our office takes acts of cruelty to animals very seriously and we are committed to holding those individuals accountable when animals are unnecessarily harmed,” Mr. Benjamin said.

Hurtado is scheduled to be sentenced on July 14, 2025, at 9 a.m. in courtroom 12 of the Ventura County Superior Court. He remains in custody with bail set at \$25,000. Hurtado faces three years in state prison.

Case: 2025005576

Defendant Information:

Christopher Hurtado (DOB 03/30/93)

Santa Paula

Charges pled to:

- PC 597(a) – Cruelty to an animal
- HS 11395(b)(1) – Possession of a hard drug (meth)

Special allegations admitted:

- PC 667S2 – Prior strike
- PC 1170(h)(3) – Prior serious or violent felony, prison eligibility
- CRC 4.421(b)(4) – Defendant was on probation
- CRC 4.421(a)(3) – Victim was vulnerable

