

# Appeal rejected in notorious Yakima murder case

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Jose Sanchez

Jose Sanchez is taken into custody Thursday, January 10, 2007, after being sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for murdering Ricky Causor and his 3-year-old daughter Mya Causor.



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The state Supreme Court has declined to hear the appeal of a man convicted in a 2005 double murder in Yakima, possibly ending the eight-year case and easing prosecutors' fears that they would have to retry what has been an exorbitantly expensive case.

Jose Luis Sanchez Jr. was one of two men convicted of aggravated first-degree murder for the killings of Ricky Causor and his 3-year-old daughter, Mya, during a home invasion on South 18th Avenue in February 2005.

Charges against Sanchez set off a lengthy case that cost taxpayers \$1.5 million in legal bills. He was ultimately sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. His codefendant, Mario Mendez, pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 30 years, but his defense team ran up fees of another \$560,000.

Part of Sanchez's appeal, which the Supreme Court decided not to hear earlier this month, involved the constitutionality of conducting his jury trial in a courtroom at the Yakima County jail rather than the Yakima County Courthouse.

In a 2010 decision involving another Yakima County case, the state Supreme Court found a murder defendant's constitutional rights had been violated by being tried in a basement courtroom at the county jail. Doing so created the possibility of prejudicing the jury against that defendant, James Jaime, and depriving him of due process, the Supreme Court ruled in a 6-3 decision. (As a result of the high court's ruling, Jaime's conviction was overturned and he later reached a plea deal that cut his original prison sentence of 34 years to about 16 years.)

The ruling threw in doubt convictions in a handful of other murder cases, the most notorious — and expensive — being the Sanchez case.

Sanchez's appeal went to the state Division III Court of Appeals in Spokane, which ruled in October 2012 that the Supreme Court's precedent-setting decision never excluded the possibility of jury trial from ever being held in a jail courtroom.

In that appellate court decision, Acting Chief Judge Laurel Siddoway wrote that then-Yakima County Superior Court Judge James Hutton, who presided over Sanchez's trial, devoted an entire hearing to consider where the trial should be held and justifiably ruled that security concerns warranted a jail courtroom rather than a courtroom in the county courthouse.

Sanchez's attorneys then asked the state Supreme Court to take the case.

"We're glad that this direct appeal seems to be over," Chief Criminal Prosecuting Attorney Ken Ramm said last week. "We would have been arguing from the Court of Appeals decision, which we prevailed on, but having nine additional sets of eyes looking at something can possibly take it a different way."

Ramm said Sanchez could still ask the high court to reconsider the case, but he doesn't think such a motion would gain traction. Sanchez retains the right for one year to a post-conviction petition to assert issues that were not brought up in his direct appeal, but other issues previously raised, such as the location of the trial, have now been settled.

Ramm said the Superior Court judge's decision to hear the case in the county jail's courtroom was based on well-established facts and circumstances surrounding the trial.

"There had been some altercations in the jail courtroom itself between the two families, so feelings were quite high," Ramm said, referring to the families of the victims and Sanchez.

Attempts to reach Sanchez's appellate attorneys, Susan Wilk and David Donnan of Seattle, were unsuccessful Friday.

The Sanchez case achieved notoriety not only for the execution-style killings and the high cost of defending him, but because of efforts to find out what two teams of appointed trial attorneys spent money on.

The Yakima Herald-Republic sued Yakima County to obtain the billing records in the Sanchez case, as well as those from the case against his co-defendant, Mario Mendez. With Sanchez, the state Supreme Court ruled 9-0 that records held by the courts are exempt from the state's Public Records Act. But it said that billing records held by county agencies such as the auditor or board of commissioners are not exempt unless the trial court issued "protective orders" prohibiting their release.

Yakima County ultimately paid the Herald-Republic almost \$80,000 in attorney fees, costs and penalties for violating the Public Records Act. The records released to the newspaper, however, were largely devoid of details on what Sanchez's attorneys spent the money on; those details presumably are detailed in documents retained under seal by the court.

With Mendez, the newspaper is attempting to have the billing records held by the trial court unsealed once his attorneys have been allowed to redact what is deemed to be strictly attorney work product and other privileged information. That case went to the Division III Court of Appeals and is back in the hands of a Superior Court judge.



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I am thankful for a break like this. Adios, dude. Never see you again.

It is about time something went right with this case. Too bad we don;t still ahve the death penalty.

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