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Mrs. Julie Benner to Work with Attorney General on Violent Crimes Case Review Team; Attorney General Announces Expanded Violent Crimes Case Review Team

Rio Rancho, NM – Mrs. Julie Benner, widow of Rio Rancho Police Department Officer Gregg ‘Nigel’ Benner, has joined New Mexico Attorney General Hector Balderas in the Violent Crimes Case Review Team--a comprehensive, solution-based evaluation of breakdowns in New Mexico’s criminal justice system and a strategic opportunity for systemic reforms.

Officer Benner was the first Rio Rancho police officer killed in the line of duty. He died after being shot on Memorial Day, allegedly by Andrew Romero, who was not in custody despite a known criminal record, substance abuse problems and gang activities.

“I don’t want anyone to go through the type of pain that I am experiencing,” said Mrs. Benner. “The justice system in New Mexico needs to come together to find real solutions and that is why I contacted Attorney General Balderas to support his Violent Crimes Case Review Team. I want to help in any way I can because it’s what Nigel would want me to do. I want New Mexico to truly become a safer state.”

“The justice system in New Mexico failed, and it failed in the worst way – the tragic death of a decorated veteran and police officer,” Attorney General Balderas said. “I am convening this Violent Crimes Case Review Team, with the help of Mrs. Benner, in order to identify short-term and long-term solutions to avoid future tragedies and to better protect all New Mexicans.”

Balderas previously announced his intention to complete a case review analysis to address problems with the current system and to identify potential improvements. Invitations have been extended to a core fact-finding team of individuals and agencies that came into direct contact with Romero, as the first phase of the case review analysis. The core group will join invited critical stakeholder organizations for the second phase, evaluating breakdowns in the system meant to provide critical services to at-risk New Mexicans such as Romero before they become a threat to public safety. Mrs. Benner will lead the final phase of the case review, Community Heroes, involving groups and individuals directly affected by systemic breakdowns with an emphasis on implementation of systemic reform.

“The alleged perpetrator of this heinous crime was not appropriate for release from custody. Romero likely came in contact with a number of law enforcement and government agencies,” he said, noting that the various agencies had “multiple opportunities” to intervene, respond and keep watch over Romero. “We must work together to make our communities safer by addressing current gaps in the system and by finding meaningful solutions,” Balderas said in extending the initial invitations.

“I am honored that Mrs. Benner reached out to us and am inspired by her willingness to work with us because she will be a powerful voice for reform and justice. In honoring her husband, her voice will be heard.”

Invitations have been sent to core agency participants who came into contact with Andrew Romero, in the first phase of the case review analysis, requesting their participation: Albuquerque Police Department, Rio Rancho Police Department, Second Judicial District Attorney’s Office, Seventh Judicial District Attorney’s Office, the superintendent of Albuquerque Public Schools, the secretary of Children, Youth and Families Department, the secretary of the Department of Corrections, the secretary of the Human Services Department; judges from the Second Judicial District and Children’s Courts; pre-trial services, child protective and juvenile justice services, and the adult jails division. Supportive agencies and stakeholders also received initial invitations and the participant list is expected to grow as the critical collaborative process moves forward.

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