

For Immediate Release:

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Contact: Jerri Mares-- (505) 321-4372

Attorney General Balderas Announces Prison Sentence for Gallup Man Convicted of Vehicular Homicide

ALBUQUERQUE, NM— Attorney General Balderas announced today that Mathew Vargas was sentenced by McKinley County Judge Robert Aragon to 7.5 years in the Department of Corrections. Vargas was convicted following a jury trial in April 2021 for vehicular homicide. This was the fourth sentencing hearing for Vargas, with the most recent being rescheduled because Vargas collapsed in the courtroom. He later tested positive for alcohol and registered a BAC of .29.

On October 14, 2017, just outside of Gallup, Vargas drove while under the influence of Xanax head-on into a truck driven by 59-year-old Ernest Baker. Vargas was also in possession of Xanax pills that he did not have a prescription for at the time of the crash. Baker's family spoke during the sentencing, describing the victim as a pillar of the community.

"Too many family members and loved ones are unnecessarily impacted by impaired drivers in New Mexico," said Attorney General Balderas. "This sentencing should serve as a deterrent to all those who believe they can drive under the influence without consequences."

The Attorney General's Office was appointed special prosecutor in this case by the Eleventh Judicial District Attorney. The case was prosecuted by Assistant Attorneys General Brett Barnes and Bryan McKay, and investigated by the Gallup Police Department with assistance from the New Mexico State Police Crash Reconstruction Unit.

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