



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
TWENTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

Michael T. Dougherty, District Attorney

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Contact: Shannon Carbone
Phone: 303-441-3804
scarbone@bouldercounty.org

Press Release – *Christopher Reyes Sentenced in Animal Cruelty case*

After pleading guilty on May 1, 2020 to all charges against him, Christopher Reyes was sentenced today to 9 years in state prison with 5 years of parole to follow, plus an additional consecutive 8 years on supervised probation with rehabilitative terms and conditions. No plea offer had been made; the defendant pled guilty to seven felony counts including First Degree Arson (F3), Criminal Mischief (F4), Retaliation Against a Victim/Witness (F3), and four counts of Cruelty to Animals (F6). The judge sentenced the defendant late this afternoon.

On October 1, 2017, emergency crews responded to a structure fire of a barn engulfed in flames. A Deputy that arrived on scene contacted the property owners, David Reyes and Ronda Hackbart-Reyes. The owners stated that they had locked the barn after feeding and boarding their horses. David Reyes said he was not certain how the fire began, however, he thought it might have been his son, Christopher Reyes, that started the fire because him and his wife had not been getting along with him lately.

Inside the barn four deceased horses were found, along with a John Deer tractor, a Gator utility vehicle, and hay bales. The estimated loss to the barn and the contents inside was approximated at \$200,000. Investigators discovered a small black “Bic” lighter and pair of black “Tasco” binoculars near the barn that were later tested and revealed the defendant’s DNA. A neighbor also told law enforcement that he saw a dark sedan matching Reyes’ car as he passed by the property.

Christopher Reyes was eventually located and arrested two days later on suspicion of a Driving Under the Influence charge near Richfield, Utah. During that arrest, Utah Highway Patrol noticed large burns on Reyes’ hands. The arrest affidavit for Christopher Reyes stated that he may have a history of mental health issues, and he would become more violent against his dad and stepmother if they stopped giving him money.

At the sentencing hearing, David Reyes explained how October 1st of 2017 was the most tragic, dramatic day of his life as he realized all four of his horses were murdered in the inferno of his barn. He explained how these horses meant everything to him and his wife and were like their children.

Defendant's stepmother, Ronda Hackbart-Reyes, explained to the Court how she had experienced nightmares and panic attacks since the fire, including nightmares of the defendant coming after her. She went on to explain how on a previous occasion in the courtroom her fears were crystalized and confirmed as the defendant mouthed to her clearly "I'm going to kill you. You're dead."

Senior Deputy District Attorney Erica Baasten stated that Christopher Reyes's crimes were "Calculated, vengeful, and hateful acts. Mr. Reyes acts with rage and hate when things do not go the way he wishes them to." After explaining how Reyes set out with the purpose to burn down the barn and how the evidence showed he knew the horses were in that barn when he spread accelerant throughout the structure before setting it ablaze, prosecutors asked that a lengthy prison sentence be imposed for the safety of the victims and the community.

District Attorney Michael Dougherty stated, "This was a horrific case, both in terms of what the defendant did to the horses and to his own family. Cases involving animal cruelty and witness intimidation are among the most egregious, so this long sentence is entirely appropriate. I feel terrible for the victims in this case and they will undoubtedly live with this tragedy for the rest of their lives. For that reason, I am especially grateful to the investigators and prosecutors who fought so hard for the just outcome."