

On Wednesday, February 16, 2012, an Austin County Jury found Cristobal Galvan-Cerna, 25, guilty of Capital Murder in the shooting death of Dr. J. Mario Gonzalez . The State elected not to seek the death penalty, and the defendant was sentenced automatically to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Jury selection for the trial commenced on February 3, 2012, with 600 summonses sent to potential jurors. After the jury was selected, evidence began on February 8th.

Wes Mau and Darin Darby, Assistant Attorneys General, presented the bulk of the evidence in the trial, with Austin County Assistant District Attorney Brandy Davidson and Legal Assistant Kasey Wickel assisting. District Attorney Travis Koehn worked behind the scenes to secure and prep witnesses and evidence.

“The State offers a variety of assistance options for counties in complex prosecutions of serious crimes,” Koehn said. “As my office only has three prosecutors, I made the decision to request the Attorney General’s help so that I could vigorously prosecute these defendants while maintaining my regular misdemeanor and felony case loads.”

Koehn added, “I’m extremely proud of the work of the Assistant Attorneys General, as well as my office and all the officers and agencies who investigated this case.”

Cristobal Galvan-Cerna was the brother of the ranch hand who worked for Dr. Gonzalez, and he was the first of four men set for trial in the 2009 murder. His guilty verdict does not affect the other three cases, and the co-defendants will be set for later trial.

The State presented over 200 exhibits and sixteen witnesses over the course of the six day trial. The defendant was represented by court appointed attorneys Pheobe Smith and Marcia Davidoff, who immediately rested following the State’s case.

The jury deliberated about an hour and a half before returning the guilty verdict. A sentencing hearing was conducted before Judge Steinhauser in the 155th District Court shortly after the verdict was read, and the defendant was formally sentenced to life without parole.

Dr. Gonzalez’s family was allowed to make a Victim Impact Statement after sentencing was completed where they directly addressed Cristobal Galvan-Cerna about how his crime has affected them.

Carlos Gonzalez, Dr. Mario Gonzalez’s brother, praised the doctor’s work ethic and cited Dr. Gonzalez as an inspiration to all of his siblings to pursue higher goals in education and life.

Charleen Gonzalez, the doctor’s widow, directly addressed the defendant, stating she and Dr. Gonzalez had done everything to help the defendant and his family before this happened and would have given them anything to save her husband’s life.

District Attorney Koehn stated, “We’re grateful for the jury’s verdict. It sends a strong message that violent crime in Austin County will not be tolerated. The Gonzalez family made a weekend home near Bellville because they were seeking peace and quiet. Although they didn’t receive it, we hope this verdict gives Dr. Gonzalez’s family a measure of justice.”

“We’re deeply sorry for the family’s loss,” Koehn said, “And we’re looking ahead to the trials of the other three men responsible for this terrible crime.”