



## ELLIS COUNTY & DISTRICT ATTORNEY

M. ANN MONTGOMERY

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### LONG-TIME ELLIS COUNTY FUGITIVE CONVICTED OF 2012 MURDER

Ellis County and District Attorney Ann Montgomery announced today that long-time fugitive Jennifer Samantha Puente (30) of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, pled guilty to Murder and Tampering/Fabricating Physical Evidence with Intent to Impair a Human Corpse for the 2012 offenses. She was sentenced to 40 years in prison for murder and 15 years for the tampering charge.

On March 17, 2012, a witness found the burning body of Moriah Gonzales (15) on the side of a road in Ennis, Texas. After investigation, the Ennis Police Department secured an arrest warrant for Puente for Gonzales' murder. An Ellis County grand jury indicted both Puente and Joe Alvarado for the murder and tampering with Gonzales' body. Puente, however, fled from Ellis County and could not be located. In 2014, Alvarado was convicted of Murder and Tampering/Fabricating Physical Evidence with Intent to Impair a Human Corpse for his role in Gonzales' death. He is currently serving a thirty-four-year sentence in prison in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

In 2016, believing Puente was in Mexico, Ellis County prosecutors and the Texas Rangers began working with United States Department of Justice officials to request arrest warrants and extradition from Mexico. In October 2022, Mexican authorities located and arrested Puente in Mexico. Months later, Puente waived extradition to the United States. On February 10, 2023, a team consisting of members from the Texas Rangers, the Ennis Police Department, and the Ellis County and District Attorney's Office returned Puente to Ellis County and booked her into the Ellis County Jail.

Murder is a first-degree felony punishable by between five and ninety-nine years or life in prison, and Tampering/Fabricating Physical Evidence with Intent to Impair a Human Corpse is a second-degree felony punishable by between two and twenty years in prison or probation. On July 2, 2024, Puente pled guilty to both charges and was sentenced by Judge Cindy Ermatinger of the 443<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Court to 40 years in prison for the murder charge and 15 years in prison for the tampering charge. The sentences will run concurrently.

“Many former and current Ellis County prosecutors, investigators, Ennis police officers, Department of Justice officials, and Texas Department of Public Safety peace officers worked tirelessly to find and bring Puente back to Ellis County,” stated Montgomery. “I am proud that this case has concluded, and we could bring justice for Moriah and her family.”

Felony Chief James Zaleta and Assistant County and District Attorney Sherry Roeder handled the case for the County and District Attorney’s Office, assisted by Investigators Tood Woodruff and Dennis Morris. The police investigation was led by Detective Sergeant Paul Asby of the Ennis Police Department and Captain Jason Bobo of the Texas Rangers.

