

Image not found or type unknown

Prosecutors Seek Death Penalty for Suspects From U.S. Virgin Islands in Murder of Florida Dentist

Crime / **Published On January 10, 2020 07:44 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **January 10, 2020**

Image not found or type unknown



Ralph Benjamin, left, and Hector Ledesma, right. Both men have been charged with attempted, premeditated murder. By. HIALEAH POLICE DEPARTMENT

Prosecutors in Florida are seeking the death penalty for two male suspects from the U.S. Virgin Islands who have been charged with [killing a Hialeah, Florida dentist](#).

A grand jury has indicted Ralph Benjamin and Hector Ledesma on first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit first-degree murder. On Friday, both men pleaded not guilty.

A Hialeah police report says Mr. Benjamin shot the dentist, Carmen Ramirez, multiple times on the stairwell leading to her dental office on East 41st Street in November.

The men were arrested in the Miami International Airport in November attempting to board a one-way flight back to the territory, the Hialeah Police Department said. Ms. Ramirez had sustained injuries in her face, neck and chest, and was in critical condition at the Jackson Memorial Hospital, with a bullet lodged near her heart. She died weeks later.

Police believe Mr. Benjamin, 39, flew into Florida for the sole purpose of hunting down and killing the dentist. Mr. Ledesma was living in Florida, but is also from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

According to police, Ms. Ramirez was walking to her office on East Eighth Avenue and 41st Street on Tuesday, Nov. 19 about 10:00 a.m., when she was shot. The suspects fired 12 shots, with six hitting the victim, police said.

In October, 2018, Mr. Ledesma's cousin, Cydmarie Cruz, [submitted an article to The Consortium](#) on Mr. Ledesma's behalf, who was once incarcerated at the infamous Virginia Red Onion Super Max Prison. The article detailed alleged abuse that Mr. Ledesma, who had been incarcerated for 13 years and 9 months, endured. Mr. Ledesma was serving time after being convicted of rape in the territory.

Mr. Benjamin has an open case in the U.S. Virgin Islands for possession of a firearm by a felon.

According to police, Ms. Ramirez was the star witness in an identity fraud case out of Orlando, where a man is accused of stealing \$40,000 from her business. The fraud suspect is facing 3-5 years in prison, and after an investigation, police found out that the man, identified as José Ledesma, is the brother of Hector Ledesma.

Police reviewed several surveillance videos to identify Hector and Mr. Benjamin. “This is a targeted shooting,” Hialeah Police Maj. Hubert Ruiz said. “Our victim has been victimized by the same group of people in increasing fashion over the past couple of years. Everything we’ve learned about this case indicates that it was an assassination attempt.”

Police revealed that Mr. Benjamin pulled the trigger, while Hector drove the getaway vehicle.

“Benjamin was flown into Florida for the sole purpose of hunting down and killing our victim, and we also believe Ledesma’s relationship to his brother, who faces jail time, leads us to our motive,” Mr. Ruiz said. “They have been identified via CCTV footage, independent witness accounts and photo lineups.”

Surveillance videos also captured the suspects visiting the area to become familiar with the dentist's whereabouts a day before committing the crime, police said.

Immediately following the incident in November, Ms. Ramirez was in a coma, and Mr. Ruiz acknowledged the possibility of the star witness of the case no longer being available to testify. “Just hours away — or really a plane ride away — from this becoming a cold case,” Mr. Ruiz said.