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NEWS RELEASE

November 10, 2016

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Avelino Tamala Convicted of Murdering Little Girl Almost 20 Years Ago

PHOENIX— Avelino Guzman Tamala (DOB 6/4/1963) was found guilty of 1st Degree Murder, for the death of three-year-old Crystal Reyes. This verdict marks the culmination of nearly two decades of investigation by multiple agencies, including cold case detectives with the Maricopa County Attorney's Office.

“Thanks to the diligence of our cold case investigation team, in cooperation with our law enforcement partners, we were able to secure justice for an innocent child whose life was inexcusably and violently cut short,” said Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery. “This conviction shows why our commitment to solve cold cases by sharing resources with law enforcement agencies throughout Maricopa County is so important and how it can make a difference in finding justice – no matter how long that may take.”

On December 1, 1998, the Maricopa County Office of the Medical Examiner recovered a partial skeleton that had been discovered in a remote area near Mobile, AZ. It would take investigators until late 2014 to positively identify the remains as those of Crystal Reyes and to unravel the story of her disappearance and death. During the intervening years, a series of separate and unrelated investigations by the Phoenix Police Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Maricopa County Attorney's Office provided pieces of information that were ultimately used to seek an indictment against Avelino Tamala.

It was learned that Crystal was born on November 26, 1993 and lived for a period with her grandmother in Mexico. She was later brought to the U.S. and lived in a residence shared by Avelino Tamala and her biological mother, Anna Reyes. According to a witness, Crystal was physically abused while living with her mother and Tamala and forced to live in a dog kennel.

Investigators developed information indicating that Crystal was killed in April, 1997 while in the care of Tamala and her mother. She was subsequently buried in the desert near Mobile. In 2014, investigators identified Crystal's biological father and used a sample of his DNA to positively identify her remains. Evidence gathered by multiple agencies in the years since Crystal's death was reviewed by the cold case investigation unit of the Maricopa County Attorney's Office, ultimately resulting in the charges against Tamala.

Sentencing for Tamala is set for December 9, 2016. The Maricopa County Attorney's Office is seeking the public's help in locating Crystal's mother, Anna Marlene Reyes, AKA Anna Marlene Somoza (DOB 3/30/1966). Anyone with information is encouraged to call the Maricopa County Attorney's Office at 602.506.3411.