

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE SIXTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT
IN AND FOR PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Case Number: 22-09348CFANO

STATE OF FLORIDA,

Plaintiff,

VS.

JUAN ARIEL MOLINA-SALLES,

Defendant.

DEPOSITION OF: JOSHUA ZARASVAND
TAKEN BY: Counsel for the Defendant
DATE: February 9, 2024
TIME: 12:46 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.
PLACE: ZOOM videoconference
REPORTED BY: Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR
Notary Public, State of FL

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ZOOM VIDEOCONFERENCE APPEARANCES

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EXHIBITS

(No exhibits were marked for identification.)

1 WHEREUPON,

2 JOSHUA ZARASVAND

3 (was adduced as the deponent herein, and being first duly
4 sworn on oath, was examined and testified as follows:)

5 EXAMINATION

6 BY MS. DELIBERATO:

7 Q Good afternoon. Could you please state and
8 spell your name for the record.

9 A Joshua Zarasvand, Z-A-R-A-S-V-A-N-D.

10 Q My name is Maria DeLiberato. I'm an assistant
11 public defender. Along with myself and Nichole Blaquiere,
12 we represent Juan Molina-Salles. It is case number for
13 PCSO S022-305232. Present for the state is
14 Ms. Constantine.

15 And I have that you authored it looks like one,
16 two, three supplements in this case, 98, 99, and 100. Is
17 that right?

18 A Correct.

19 Q Any other supplements that I missed?

20 A No.

21 Q Have you had a chance to review your supplements
22 before today's deposition?

23 A Yes.

24 Q And if there's any time you need to refer to
25 them in the depo, perfectly fine. Just let me know that's

1 what you're doing.

2 A All right.

3 Q Can you tell me how you're employed?

4 A I'm a sergeant with the Pinellas County Sheriff.

5 Q And how long have you been with PCSO?

6 A Since 2015.

7 Q And how long have you been a sergeant?

8 A Since -- one year. Since last year, last
9 February.

10 Q And any prior law enforcement before 2015?

11 A So I've worked -- yes. I worked at the Lincoln
12 Police Department in Lincoln, Nebraska. I worked -- I
13 started there in 2011, in February, and I worked from then
14 until I came to the Sheriff's office in November of 2015.

15 Q Okay.

16 A And I worked for another sheriff's office before
17 that in like the corrections/jail. I started there in
18 2005. I worked there --

19 Q That was -- sorry, go ahead.

20 A That's all right. So I worked there. I can
21 tell you it was Pottawattamie, P-O-T-T-A-W-A-T-T-A-M-I-E,
22 County Sheriff in Council Bluffs, Iowa. I started there
23 in December of 2005. I worked there until February of
24 2011. So I went from there to Lincoln and then from
25 Lincoln to Pinellas.

1 Q Okay. In all of your time as a law enforcement
2 officer in Iowa, Nebraska, and here Pinellas County,
3 Florida, have you ever had any complaints sustained
4 against you for any reason?

5 A No.

6 Q Okay. So with PCSO as a sergeant, this is an
7 incident that occurred back September 22nd, 2022. Were
8 you a sergeant at that point, or were you a deputy?

9 A I was a detective in our Robbery-Homicide Unit.

10 Q Detective in Robbery-Homicide. Okay. And how
11 long had you been a detective for Robbery-Homicide?

12 A I'll give you the date I started in
13 Robbery-Homicide. As far as doing the math, I apologize,
14 I was out late last night with the crew. So, let's see, I
15 started Robbery-Homicide in July of 2021.

16 Q Okay. And how was it that you got called out to
17 this case?

18 A So I got called from my sergeant at the time,
19 Sergeant Robinson. She had called and said that there was
20 an officer or a deputy who had been killed and that I need
21 to respond to like a portion of the interstate, I-275.

22 Q Okay. And it sounds like you were actually
23 first dispatched to what we're calling sort of a secondary
24 crash, which was another vehicle that had crashed that was
25 at that point -- it couldn't be determined if it was

1 related to Deputy Hartwick's death. Is that right?

2 A Correct. Really, that was the most of what I
3 did actually because it took hours to kind of figure out
4 that the victim of the crash was not involved.

5 Q Okay. And that was -- it was the same
6 construction site though? It was the same Archer --
7 managed by Archer western, the same construction of the
8 highway?

9 A well, I know they have a huge project that they
10 were working on. I would be assuming. It's a massive
11 project that they are undertaking, and from what I believe
12 is that it was involved with -- was involved further down
13 the road as a result of kind of what was going on, the
14 other crash.

15 Q So you actually never went straight to the scene
16 of Deputy Hartwick's accident first. I know you went
17 there a little bit later, but you never went --

18 A Actually, I got to -- something like this is
19 very hectic. You also are trying to get onto the
20 interstate the wrong way, and there was all kind of -- the
21 roads were blocked. There's deputies and police officers
22 from other agencies blocking all kinds of stuff.

23 So I actually made it to the outskirts of what
24 we'll call the scene on the interstate having to drive the
25 wrong way up the interstate, and by the time I got there,

1 they said go back to Bayfront. So I guess technically my
2 car was there, but I did not do any type of investigation
3 there.

4 Q Okay. So just so I clarify, when you first got
5 there, you never went to Deputy Hartwick's site at all?

6 A Correct.

7 Q And then you went to the secondary scene, but
8 really, you didn't get out of your cruiser?

9 A So I never went to where the car crashed. I
10 never went there.

11 Q You never went there?

12 A Never went there. I went to where Deputy
13 Hartwick was.

14 Q Understood.

15 A But the road was -- they blocked where he had
16 been hit so far back that I would have had to get out and
17 walk a long ways. I got my car to what we'll consider I'm
18 calling the scene, which might have been a quarter-mile of
19 just cruisers and just people blocking the road.

20 Q It was a very large scene.

21 A It was very large. So I never made it to like
22 where the actual incident happened. I was like on the
23 outskirts of where Deputy Hartwick was hit. I never went
24 to where the -- I don't know how you say his name. But
25 the guy who crashed his car, I never went to where his car

1 was crashed.

2 Q Okay. You went straight to the hospital to
3 follow up with that crash?

4 A Correct.

5 Q His name for the record is Ramnauth,
6 R-A-M-N-A-U-T-H. Does that sound right?

7 A That's correct. Yes.

8 Q And so you went to Bayfront Hospital, and what
9 did you do when you get there?

10 A So there was already -- we have like a Major
11 Accident Investigation Team, and there was already a
12 couple of them there. So I met up with one of the
13 deputies -- his name is Deputy Blake -- and he had told me
14 that -- I said, where's the driver of this car that was
15 crashed, you know, just south of where Deputy Hartwick was
16 hit? And he said that the guy was in trauma room number
17 one, but he was intubated, and he was not able to talk.
18 So he kind of just told me what -- he actually got to
19 speak with him briefly, so he had told me what -- is it
20 Ramnauth?

21 Q I think so. Ramnauth. I'm not sure.

22 A Ramnauth. Okay. So he gave me a little bit of
23 what Ramnauth had told him before being intubated and
24 being out to where I couldn't talk to him. At that point,
25 we didn't know his involvement for our end of it. So

1 that's -- so I kind of just was on standby for a period of
2 time.

3 Q Okay. while you were at the hospital did you
4 all sort of determine that he actually wasn't in any way
5 involved with Deputy Hartwick's accident?

6 A Eventually I was called by I think Sergeant
7 Robinson, and she -- after a couple of hours of me being
8 there, she said that they were able to determine that he
9 wasn't involved and to come back.

10 Q And it sounds like there were two other deputies
11 at the hospital, Boateng, B-O-A-T-E-N-G, and Mason, and
12 they also sort of had observed that crash as well. Is
13 that right?

14 A Correct. So they had came while I was there
15 after a period of time. I can't remember when they
16 actually showed up. At first when I got there, it was
17 just Deputy Blake is who I talked to. He's a member of
18 the Major Accident Investigation Team.

19 Q Okay.

20 A And then later, while I was still there, Boateng
21 and Mason arrived, and they actually -- I think one of
22 them witnessed the crash him, him driving off a bridge --
23 unfinished bridge.

24 Q Right. And so did you sort of do any follow-up?
25 You've basically notified the sergeant, Look, this isn't

1 related. Kind of what do I do. And then what do you do
2 next?

3 A So then she -- so I think we ended up getting
4 blood samples and stuff like that, but that was when we
5 were still under the assumption that he might have been --
6 at that point -- so that was before I kind of got all that
7 other stuff from these other deputies to rule him out. So
8 I did do some other work kind of focusing on Ramnauth at
9 the hospital. I put a hold on his blood. I'm thinking,
10 you know, if he was part of this, I'm going to make sure
11 that we get that and doesn't get lost, the admission blood
12 or whatever. But, yeah, once I was kind of -- I had
13 talked to these two deputies, and they said, hey, this
14 isn't involved and we feel comfortable, Sergeant Robinson
15 asked me to come back to the scene.

16 Q Did you like take anything from the hospital,
17 the blood or somebody else did that to take it?

18 A So they took over that because that needed to be
19 investigated also.

20 Q Separately, right?

21 A Yeah, differently.

22 Q Submitted in evidence or whatever.

23 A So the major accident team, they took over that.
24 So, yeah, I didn't have anything else to do with that.

25 Q Okay. So then at some point you go back to

1 Deputy Hartwick's scene?

2 A Correct.

3 Q And then what do you do? And that's about it
4 looks like around 3:30 in the morning at this point?

5 A Yes, about 3:30 I get there. I meet with
6 Lieutenant Scarpati. He had -- they had developed during
7 the time that I was at the hospital a person of interest
8 that they had an ID for from North Carolina. The name on
9 it was different than what I think his name actually ends
10 up being later on. So the ID was for someone named Victor
11 Vacquez.

12 Q That's V-A-C-Q-U-E-Z for the record.

13 A Correct. And then it was later determined that
14 is Mr. Molina-Salles. So he had showed me that picture,
15 the lieutenant, and said -- so this Archer project is
16 large. So they only do -- that's only one part of the
17 operation, that part of I-275. I mean, they were doing
18 work over off of Ulmerton. I think it's a multi -- it has
19 multiple areas that they're working. So one of their I
20 guess maybe -- I don't know if it's their main office, but
21 they built kind of a little area off of Roosevelt and I
22 think -- I can't remember what the cross street was. I'd
23 have to look.

24 Q It looks like Ulmerton and Roosevelt.

25 A Ulmerton and Roosevelt, yeah. So they built

1 like a, I guess, temporary office area for where they
2 would work out of. But, I mean, it was three in the
3 morning, so nobody administratively was there. He
4 basically said -- he gave picture of, well, Mr. Molina,
5 that picture. So he gave him that picture, and he said go
6 there and just see -- because they were looking for him at
7 that point. They determined this person needed to be
8 found, and they didn't know where he was at. So they
9 said, Go to the office. Maybe somebody knows him. Maybe
10 they know where he's at, and we can try to find him.

11 Q Okay. So you go there. The offices are sort of
12 formally closed, but there's a couple of people kind of
13 milling about, two workers it looks like?

14 A Correct. Neither one of them knew him. Like I
15 said, this is such a big -- they have I don't know how
16 many employees, but it's significant. So they didn't know
17 him.

18 Q And this was Jose Figueroa-Hernandez and Yolanda
19 Saldana-Chavez, the two people that you spoke to?

20 A Correct.

21 Q Did they speak English?

22 A I had someone speaking Spanish with me. So if
23 there was issues, English and Spanish, I had a deputy with
24 me who spoke Spanish. I don't recall if they spoke
25 Spanish or English.

1 Q Okay. And was that Lieutenant Paniagua?

2 A So Paniagua -- actually, he was later. I had a
3 deputy with me, which I guess I don't see his name in
4 there. But there was a deputy who also spoke Spanish. I
5 don't remember him actually needing to translate for me,
6 but I knew just -- sometimes when you have a Spanish
7 speaker -- I mean, I just had a feeling that there was
8 maybe a possibility that I would have a language barrier,
9 so I wanted to just -- I think I brought that deputy with
10 me just in case.

11 Q Okay. So the two workers that you saw at the
12 office, they didn't have any knowledge of Victor Vacquez
13 or Juan Molina-Salles? They didn't recognize the picture
14 or anything like that?

15 A Correct.

16 Q And then you went back to I-275?

17 A Correct.

18 Q And what were you asked to do?

19 A So then at that point, that's when I had
20 Lieutenant Paniagua who speaks Spanish.

21 Q That's P-A-N-I-A-G-U-A for the record.

22 A So I was told that there was -- so there's three
23 employees who worked with Mr. Molina, and they had been
24 interviewed by a homicide detective already. So they were
25 like don't -- you don't need to interview them, but just

1 see what we can find to see if we can try to figure out
2 where he could possibly be.

3 Q Okay. Sort of get additional information about
4 where he could live or where he goes or where he
5 frequents, things like that?

6 A Yes. That way we can just -- whatever we can
7 find. But they said as far as getting a timeline of
8 events of what happened, they said don't -- we've already
9 established that. You don't even need to worry about it.
10 They said just figure out where he might be or where we
11 could possibly find him.

12 Q And did you have body-worn camera on at the time
13 of this?

14 A No.

15 Q Did you record your interviews with them?

16 A No.

17 Q Any reason why not?

18 A Like I said, it wasn't -- they weren't really, I
19 guess, interviews. It was essentially like, Hey, where
20 would he be at? So I wasn't trying to -- I mean,
21 technically I guess I was getting information, but as far
22 as it wasn't necessarily an interview I guess in my mind.

23 Q I understand.

24 A I was just trying to locate him.

25 Q Did you have like a recording device with you at

1 the time that you could have recorded if you decided to?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Okay. And Lieutenant Paniagua, did he have a
4 recording device?

5 A I don't know.

6 Q Okay. So you talked to them kind of one-by-one
7 on the side of the road?

8 A Correct.

9 Q And are -- is the search ongoing for
10 Mr. Molina-Salles at this point?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Are there helicopters up or not yet because it's
13 still dark?

14 A I don't know if there was a helicopter.

15 Q Okay. So you talked to three people, and what
16 did they tell you? what information are you able to get?

17 A So with the first one, Cinthia -- well, they all
18 have a couple of names that they go by. I think that the
19 one we've established is her actual name, Cinthia
20 Gomez-Hernandez basically told us that she doesn't talk to
21 Juan and had only been working on that crew for three
22 weeks. So she didn't have anything to help us locate him
23 and so --

24 Q And did --

25 A Go ahead.

1 Q Before I go on to the other, I have a follow-up
2 question. Are you done with what she told you?

3 A Yeah. I mean, she didn't have -- like I said,
4 all I was really trying to get out of any of these three
5 people is where would Juan be. That's really all I wanted
6 to know. So like if they would have known, hey, he
7 usually goes here or goes there, that was all I really
8 wanted to get out of them because I wanted -- my task was
9 to see where Juan was or where he could be.

10 Q And so but she had originally given you a
11 different name of Nicole Iala. Is that right?

12 A Correct.

13 Q Did she have an ID for that? Do you remember?

14 A I don't remember.

15 Q What was her demeanor like?

16 A She was cooperative. All three of these people
17 were cooperative. I mean, they seemed -- I mean, I don't
18 speak Spanish, so I don't -- I can't tell, like, their
19 tone. I know with other languages when you speak, there's
20 certain ways you can say certain things to people that are
21 maybe telling to a native speaker that maybe when you
22 translate it -- so Paniagua is translating to me -- I may
23 not get that. But as far as I'm concerned, I thought they
24 all seemed cooperative.

25 Q So the next person you spoke to is Pedro Davula,

1 who was later determined to be Allan Gomez-Zelaya
2 Z-E-L-A-Y-A. Same question, do you remember, did he give
3 you an ID with that name, or did he just say that was his
4 name?

5 A I believe he just said that was his name.

6 Q And what does he tell you?

7 A So he had been working with him for a couple of
8 months. He believed that Juan used to live in Tampa, but
9 he didn't know where he lived now or didn't at that point.
10 So that was kind of really all I got out of him. Like I
11 said, I wasn't digging. These were not long interviews.
12 They were very, where's he at? where could he be? And
13 then okay, and then on to the next one.

14 Q Sort of like a couple of minutes each you think?

15 A I would say they were very short. I don't
16 remember how long. Like I said, there was not a -- I
17 didn't ask them really -- like, Do you know him? They
18 said yes or no or what I told you what Nicole said or
19 Cinthia and then what Allan said as far as knowing him for
20 a couple of months. She knew him for couple of weeks.
21 And then I said, Okay, where would he be? They're like, I
22 don't know. Then I pretty much move on to the next one.

23 Q So less than five minutes each?

24 A I would think so. I was not with them very long
25 at all.

1 Q And then the last person was Jose Perez-Ramirez,
2 who was determined to be Douglas Hernandez-Valladaras
3 later?

4 A Correct. So then him also, he had also worked
5 with Mr. Molina for a couple of months. He had no idea.
6 He basically said they don't talk about personal stuff
7 with each other, and that he had no idea where he would be
8 located or where he would be at.

9 Q And was Pedro Davula, who was later Allan
10 Gomez-Zelaya, was he ultimately arrested in conjunction
11 with this case?

12 A Pedro. That was one of the people I talked to?

13 Q Yeah. He was Allan Gomez-Zelaya.

14 A I don't remember.

15 Q Okay. Not that --

16 A I mean, I didn't arrest him.

17 Q You didn't have any involvement in that?

18 A No.

19 Q Okay. Any other people that you spoke to other
20 than these three?

21 A No.

22 Q Were you on scene when Mr. Molina-Salles was
23 apprehended?

24 A I wasn't around him. I may have been on the
25 interstate somewhere but I --

1 Q Yeah. Your report says you were relieved
2 shortly after he was located. So I didn't know if you
3 were in the vicinity where he was located.

4 A No.

5 Q Do you know anything about his --

6 A I don't even know where he was found. I think
7 in a wooded area, but that's all I know. I never was in
8 any woods.

9 Q Okay. Did you have any other involvement in the
10 case after this day?

11 A The only other thing that was very limited, it
12 looks like I was given Deputy Hartwick's wallet at one
13 point to hold for the family, but that was really it.

14 Q Did you actually end up giving it to the family
15 or did you --

16 A No, I didn't. I believe it ended up going to
17 the case agent who worked the case, and I think he ended
18 up giving it to the family. You would have to confirm
19 with him.

20 Q But you held that for a period of time and then
21 just --

22 A Yeah, that's it and just -- yeah, that was it.

23 Q You didn't collect any other evidence or talk to
24 any other witnesses?

25 A No. No.

1 Q Did you attend any briefings either within your
2 department or the state attorney's office about the case
3 or the prosecution of this case?

4 A Not that I remember.

5 MS. DELIBERATO: Okay. I don't have any further
6 questions. Nichole or Liz, questions?

7 MS. CONSTANTINE: I don't have any questions.

8 MS. DELIBERATO: I will conclude the deposition.
9 It's totally up to you if you want to read or waive.

10 THE DEPONENT: I'm good. I'll waive.

11 (Deposition concludes at 1:10 p.m.)
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COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

STATE OF FLORIDA)

CERTIFICATE OF OATH

I, the undersigned authority, certify that
JOSHUA ZARASVAND personally appeared before me on the 9th
day of February, 2024, and was duly sworn.

witness my hand and official seal this 10th day
of February, 2024.

Tamara M. Pacheco

Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR
COMMISSION #942612
EXPIRES: March 30, 2024

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

STATE OF FLORIDA)

COUNTY OF PINELLAS)

I, Tamara M. Pacheco, certify that I was authorized to and did stenographically report the Deposition of JOSHUA ZARASVAND; that a review of the transcript was NOT requested; and that the transcript is a true and complete record of my stenographic notes.

I further certify that I am not a relative, employee, attorney or counsel of any of the parties, nor am I a relative or employee of any of the parties' attorney or counsel connected with the action, nor am I financially interested in the action.

Tamara M. Pacheco

Tamara M. Pacheco, RPR