

OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

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District Attorney



04-839

RELEASE NUMBER

April 17, 2026

RELEASE DATE

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***** PRESS RELEASE *****

**1988 Cold Case Solved-Aloysius James Sentenced to Life Without the Possibility of Parole
Almost 38 Years After He Raped and Murdered Ofelia Sandoval On September 18, 1988 In
Santa Maria, California**

Re: *People v. Aloysius James*
Santa Barbara Superior Court Case No. 24CR02219

SANTA MARIA, Calif., — Santa Barbara County District Attorney John T. Savrnoch announced today that Judge Kristy Imel sentenced Aloysius James to the maximum sentence allowed by law of life without the possibility of parole. A jury returned a verdict on February 27, 2026 of guilty of first-degree murder with the special circumstance of murder in the commission of the rape of thirty-year-old Ofelia Sandoval, who was killed on September 18, 1988, in Santa Maria, California.

Ofelia Sandoval was discovered strangled to death, on the floor of her home on the evening of September 18, 1988. Santa Maria Police Officers vigorously investigated her death in 1988 and collected countless pieces of evidence. Her death was ruled a homicide. Despite a valiant effort to solve her murder, the case went cold in 1989.

Over the years many different SMPD detectives worked on the murder of Ofelia. In the early 2000's the Department of Justice used technology to develop a DNA profile of an unknown male on items found in Ofelia's room. The male DNA profile did not match to any known DNA profiles and did not match to any profiles in the national database. However, the Santa Maria Police Department never gave up on solving Ofelia's murder.

In 2018, the FBI partnered with SMPD to obtain a covert DNA profile from Aloysius James. Then in 2023, the Department of Justice developed the same male suspect DNA profile from samples taken at Ofelia Sandoval's autopsy in 1988. SMPD detectives obtained a warrant for the arrest of Aloysius James, and they booked him into custody in Georgia on April 16, 2024.

Today marks the culmination of almost 38 years of work on the murder of Ofelia Sandoval and the beginning of some sense of closure for Ofelia's family. Four generations of Ofelia's family have supported this investigation and prosecution for decades. Today Ofelia's family spoke about the impact of her life and senseless death on them and on the community. The bravery, dedication, and resilience of Ofelia's three children Marcelino, Maricela and Alex is truly remarkable.

District Attorney John Savrnoch would again like to thank first and foremost Ofelia Sandoval's family. He would also again like to thank and acknowledge the combined efforts of retired law enforcement officers Titsworth, Begg, Spears, Marquez, Mahwinney, Hupp, Prescott, Flores, Graham, and Hammond. The entire Santa Maria Police Department including officers Stowasser, Silver, and Craven. FBI Special Agents Smith and McPherson, the Hall County Regional Swat Team in Hall County Georgia and the Gainesville Police Department in Georgia. Special thank you to San Luis Obispo County District Attorney's Office for their contribution of Investigator Julia Tatarian, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, Coroners Bureau, and the Department of Justice DNA Laboratory. He also thanks Senior Deputy District Attorney Ann Bramsen, D.A. Investigator Ronnie Murillo and victim advocate Biannet Garcia for their hard work and dedication to achieving justice in this case.

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