



## Administrative Office of the Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 11, 2026

State's highest court affirms murder conviction for the death of a Roswell woman

SANTA FE – The state Supreme Court today upheld the convictions of a Chaves County man for the murder of his wife in 2017.

In a unanimous opinion written by Justice Michael E. Vigil, the Court rejected arguments by Castulo Aragon Jr. that he should receive a new trial. The justices vacated one of Aragon's three convictions for evidence tampering as a violation of constitutional protections against double jeopardy for multiple punishments for the same crime. Aragon's case returns to the trial court for resentencing after the dismissal of the one evidence tampering conviction.

Aragon was sentenced in 2022 to life in prison for his conviction of first-degree murder in the death of Maria Aragon, and three years for each of the three convictions of evidence tampering. Aragon represented himself in the trial at which he was convicted. His first trial ended in a hung jury.

The victim's body was found face down along a highway north of Roswell. Her hair was matted with blood, her feet were bare and her bloody sweater was on backward. She had been strangled, stabbed in the chest and struck in the head with a blunt object. The evidence suggested she had been transported to the location.

In his appeal, Aragon contended there was insufficient evidence to support his convictions, that some evidence was wrongly admitted at his jury trial, and there was prosecutorial misconduct.

The Court concluded there was no improper conduct by the prosecutor warranting a new trial and the evidence was "plainly sufficient" for the defendant's convictions.

Evidence of the victim's blood was found in the laundry room in the Roswell house she shared with the defendant. The victim's blood also was found at a different property in Roswell owned by the defendant — on newspapers, a paper towel, a convenience store bag and pieces of duct tape in a trash can. A digital forensics expert testified at Aragon's trial about tracking the defendant's phone, including to a location close to where the victim's body was found.

The defendant testified that he ran several errands and worked at rental properties on the day of the murder. He said the victim texted him that she was going for a walk.

Aragon argued on appeal that testimony from the victim’s hairdresser, supervisor, a client and coworkers was unfairly prejudicial and should not have been admitted at his trial. The hairdresser testified that the victim told her the marriage was not as good as she had expected and that she planned to talk to the defendant about their relationship. The victim’s supervisor at work testified that the defendant had followed him and the victim during a business visit to a client, and that the defendant called multiple times over a long period of time checking whether his wife was with the supervisor.

The Court wrote that “the prior acts and demeanor testimony of the lay witnesses in this case was highly probative of Defendant’s motive to prevent Victim from leaving the relationship. And while that testimony was prejudicial to Defendant, its prejudicial effect did not substantially outweigh the probative value of Defendant’s motive to kill Victim.”

Aragon also argued that a nurse practitioner’s testimony was improper evidence about character traits. The testimony provided information about intimate partner violence, including that abusers track their partners and that manual strangulation of the victim was consistent with intimate partner violence.

The Court determined that the testimony was “highly relevant and probative because it provided the jury with specialized information that explained abusive relationships.” The Court noted that the generalized testimony by the nurse practitioner did not specifically discuss the victim’s relationship with the defendant and “did not lead to unfair prejudice because it was not inflammatory.”

The Court rejected Aragon’s argument that his Sixth Amendment right to confront and cross-examine prosecution witnesses was violated, including by testimony from a substitute medical examiner who did not perform the victim’s autopsy. The Court explained that the substitute medical examiner “conclusion that Victim was strangled was not testimonial because it was based not on the autopsy report, but on the autopsy photographs.”

In concluding that there was no constitutional violation, the justices for the first time recognized a U.S. Supreme Court precedent in a 2024 opinion in the case of *Smith v. Arizona*. The ruling by the nation’s highest court provided guidelines on how the Confrontation Clause applied to testimony by a substitute forensics expert who did not conduct the scientific analysis offered as evidence.

###

To read the decision in *State v. Aragon*, No. S-1-SC-40256, please visit the New Mexico Compilation Commission's website using the following link:

<https://nmonesource.com/nmos/nmsc/en/item/538190/index.do>