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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### JURY CONVICTS NORTENO GANG MEMBER

A Merced County jury convicted Merced resident Richard Thomas, 26, for being an active participant in a criminal street gang for his role in a November, 2006 assault. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on two related charges. The incident occurred on the night before Thanksgiving in front of a Merced bar, according to Deputy District Attorney Christa Gonzalez, who prosecuted the case.

Testimony at trial revealed that the victim, who was outside the bar, was assaulted by Thomas and other Norteno gang members. Thomas knocked the victim unconscious, then continued kicking his defenseless victim in the head. The repeated blows caused the victim to suffer a severe laceration to the head, which required extensive suturing. Thomas also threatened to kill the victim's wife when she said she was going to call police. As police arrived, Thomas and his fellow gang members fled on foot, added Gonzalez. Police apprehended them a short time later.

"I respect the jury's verdict and appreciate their efforts during trial and deliberations. I understand that it can be difficult to get twelve people to agree on the facts of a particular case," said Gonzalez. "I am hopeful that we will retry Thomas and hold him accountable for all of his actions. It is the intent of the District Attorney's office to vigorously prosecute these gang members who feel they can spread terror on our streets with impunity," Gonzalez added.

Local attorney David Capron represented Thomas. Superior Court Presiding Judge John D. Kiriara presided over the trial. Because of his conviction, and the fact that Thomas has a prior "strike" conviction for a gang related weapons offense, Thomas faces 12 years in prison when he is sentenced.