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FELONY AND MISDEMEANOR CHARGES FILED IN 2016
FATAL BUS CRASH NEAR LIVINGSTON

The Merced County District Attorney's office filed four felony counts of vehicular manslaughter and five misdemeanor vehicle code violations against Mario David Vasquez of Los Angeles on Monday in connection with an early morning bus crash on August 2nd of 2016 outside Livingston that claimed four lives and resulted in serious injuries to eight passengers, District Attorney Larry D. Morse II announced.

Vasquez, age 58, was driving a bus owned by Autobuses Coordinados USA, Inc. southbound on Highway 99 just south of Hammatt Avenue around 3:18 a.m. when the bus left the roadway and collided with a sign pole on northbound Highway 99. The pole split through the middle of the bus crushing rows of seats. In addition to the four fatalities, several of the injured passengers lost limbs to amputation.

The accident was investigated by the California Highway Patrol's Multidisciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) from Fresno, which turned over its findings to the District Attorney's office last week. The report indicated the defendant had been operating the motor coach since approximately 7:30 p.m. on August 1st in the area of Los Angeles. Though the report did not indicate that Vasquez was on his cell phone at the time of the accident, evidence from cellular phone records show that he used his cell phone numerous times while driving the 49-passenger motor coach through California, including a call a few minutes before the fatal crash, Morse said.

The defendant's log book, which is required for commercial drivers, indicated he had slept only 6.5 hours the previous day although cell phone records contradict that he even slept that many hours, Morse said, noting that fatigue is believed to be a major factor in the crash. Surviving passengers described defendant Vasquez as looking tired or drowsy during travel and multiple drivers on Highway 99 in Merced County contacted investigators after the crash to report that the bus had been observed weaving shortly before the accident.

The defendant was licensed as a California Class B commercial driver and had reportedly driven buses for 30 years, Morse said. The misdemeanor

violations stem from the defendant's falsification of his daily log book, failure to keep accurate records and violating laws relating to maximum driving time for commercial drivers.

"Given their size and the potential dangers 18-wheelers and buses pose for other motorists, commercial drivers are appropriately held to the highest standards for safety under state law. Mr. Vasquez's extreme fatigue, violations of commercial regulations and repeated use of a cell phone while entrusted with the care of passengers demonstrated a gross dereliction of the duty he owed not just to his passengers, but to every motorist on Highway 99 that morning," Morse said.