



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
TWENTIETH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

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CITY OF LONGMONT | Department of Public Safety  
Police, Fire, and Community Health & Resilience

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## PRESS RELEASE

### *District Attorney's Office and Longmont Department of Public Safety Announce Recovery of Remains of Rita Gutierrez-Garcia as the Result of Cold Case Homicide Prosecution*

Today, after several years of relentless investigation, the District Attorney's Office and Longmont Department of Public Safety can announce the recovery of Rita Gutierrez-Garcia's remains. Earlier today, preliminary results from DNA analysis confirmed that the body of Rita ("Rita") Gutierrez-Garcia has been recovered. The recovery is the culmination of a years-long effort to hold her killer responsible and to recover Rita's remains.

She had last been seen by friends near a Longmont bar in the downtown Longmont area on March 18, 2018, at approximately 2:30 a.m. Juan Figueroa Jr. (33 years old) was identified early in the investigation as a possible suspect in Rita's disappearance.

Figueroa was, also, investigated for the Attempted Murder and Sexual Assault of another woman. Figueroa was arrested for that horrific attack and prosecuted by the District Attorney's Office. The case went to trial and the jury returned guilty verdicts. Figueroa received a sentence of 93-years-to-life in the Department of Corrections. He is currently serving that 93-years-to-life sentence.

The investigation into Rita's disappearance and cold case homicide involved a multi-state investigation, dozens of interviews and search warrants, follow-up on hundreds of tips and leads, wide-ranging search efforts for her remains, and the use of forensic testing to identify essential DNA evidence.

As a direct result of this extensive investigation, the District Attorney's Office presented the case to the Grand Jury. In June 2021, the Grand Jury indicted Juan Figueroa Jr. for the First-Degree

Murder and Kidnapping of Rita Gutierrez-Garcia. The case moved forward as the prosecution of a “no-body homicide” since Rita’s remains had not been recovered.

From the beginning of the prosecution of the murder case, her family’s strongest desire and their top priority has been the return of Rita’s remains. The murder case had been set for trial in May. In the weeks leading up to the trial date in May, the prosecution team and the defense attorneys continued to discuss the case.

Information was provided to the District Attorney’s Office and Longmont Department of Public Safety, including the exact location of Rita’s remains. On April 28, 2022, Longmont Police Department and District Attorney staff, along with Boulder County and Weld County Coroner personnel, searched an area located in Weld County, east of Longmont. Human remains were recovered from the location that had been provided. No identification or property was found at the site. That evening, our team met with Rita’s mother and sisters to inform them that the remains were likely those of Rita.

Following the autopsy, samples were submitted for DNA analysis and comparison. On May 19, 2022, the preliminary results from the analysis of the DNA samples confirmed that the remains are those of Rita Gutierrez-Garcia.

Detective Cody Clark, Detective Sergeant Todd Chambers, First Assistant District Attorney Katharina Booth, Senior Deputy District Attorney Michelle Sudano, and District Attorney Investigator Chris Merkle are to be commended for their tenacity, skill, and tireless efforts on behalf of Rita, her family, and the Longmont community. While speaking with the team, Rita’s sister stated with relief, “This is no longer a missing person investigation.” The District Attorney’s Office and Longmont Police Services are grateful to bring Rita home to her family.

Figuroa’s next court date is now scheduled for June 3, 2022. A dispositional hearing for both a guilty plea and sentencing is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on that date. The case is no longer scheduled for trial.

In court, more information will be provided regarding the circumstances and details. Prior to the entry of a guilty plea, legal and ethical rules strictly limit what information can be provided. Immediately following the court appearance on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, we will answer any additional questions at a press conference outside the Justice Center located at 1777 6<sup>th</sup> Street, Boulder, CO.

*\*\*The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty; the charges are merely an accusation.*