

Plainfield man admits to role in 2015 fatal shooting of innocent bystander

A Plainfield man has admitted to being responsible for a shooting that took the life of an innocent bystander in 2015, acting Union County Prosecutor Thomas K. Isenhour announced Friday.

Abdul Ward, 26, earlier this week pleaded guilty to a charge of aggravated manslaughter before state Superior Court Judge Robert Kirsch in connection with the death of 31-year-old Wilson Valdez.

Shortly after 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 12, 2015, Plainfield Police Division units rushed to the 600 block of Berckman Street on a report of a shooting, according to Union County Assistant Prosecutor Jeremiah Lenihan, who prosecuted the case. Valdez, who had been working in a convenience store at the time of the incident, was pronounced dead shortly thereafter, Lenihan said.

Arriving Plainfield patrol units spotted a suspect vehicle leaving the scene of the shooting, and a brief pursuit ended when it collided with an SUV at the intersection of Central Avenue and West Sixth Street. A handgun was recovered from the vehicle, and Ward was subsequently taken into custody. Two occupants of the SUV and a pedestrian in the area at the time were treated for non life-threatening injuries.

A Union County Homicide Task Force investigation revealed that Ward, a confirmed member of the Elizabeth-based 111 N.H.C. (Neighborhood Crips) street gang, had been targeting a local drug dealer when Valdez was killed. Just days after the shooting, Ward and about a dozen other defendants were charged with racketeering and numerous other crimes as the result of a

long-term Prosecutor's Office's Guns, Gangs, Drugs, and Violent Crimes Task Force investigation into the gang's activities.

The investigation resulted in a 49-count indictment returned under New Jersey's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute, targeting the defendants for their roles in incidents of identity theft, tax fraud, illegal production of fake debit and gift cards, and drug sales. The primary target of the investigation and gang ringleader, 27-year-old Arthur Negron of Elizabeth – who was with Ward at the time of the shooting – ultimately pleaded guilty to a charge of first-degree racketeering and is awaiting sentencing.

Ten of the defendants in all were sentenced or are awaiting sentencing to state prison terms, as Ward's manslaughter plea marked the case's last criminal charge to be adjudicated.

Sentencing for Ward has been scheduled for Friday, February 2, 2018, at which time the State will recommend a sentence of 28 years in state prison, with 85 percent of the term to be served before the possibility of parole.