

Elizabeth man convicted on eight charges for killing wife, dumping her body in abandoned home

A Union County jury has convicted an Elizabeth man of killing his wife in the home they shared with their young child, dumping her body in an abandoned home 10 miles away, and repeatedly lying to investigators about what took place as they worked to solve the crime, acting Union County Prosecutor Michael A. Monahan announced Monday.

After jury deliberations taking place over the course of four days and a trial before state Superior Court Judge Robert Kirsch that lasted more than a month, 43-year-old Abayuba Rivas was found not guilty of murder, but guilty of first-degree aggravated manslaughter, second-degree endangering the welfare of a child, second-degree desecration of human remains, two related weapons offenses, and three counts of hindering apprehension.

On Sunday, February 23, 2014, Rivas killed 32-year-old Karla Jose Villagra Garzon, then stuffed her body inside a suitcase and drove to a vacant residence on Southern Boulevard in Chatham Township, where he left her on a mattress in the basement, according to Union County Assistant Prosecutor Caroline Lawlor, who prosecuted the case. Rivas reported Garzon missing the next morning, telling authorities at the time that she had went out the night before but never returned, Lawlor said. A citywide search for Garzon ensued, boosted by friends and family members who took to social media to urge citizens to help find her and Rivas himself, who went on camera for media interviews to plead for assistance from the public before ultimately confessing to police that he

killed her.

A joint investigation by the Union County Homicide Task Force, Elizabeth Police Department, and New Jersey State Police Missing Persons Unit led to Rivas being identified as a suspect in the case, and he was subsequently arrested and held on \$2 million bail. With duct tape binding her hands and covering her eyes and mouth, Garzon's body was recovered from the vacant home approximately three weeks after she had been reported missing; an autopsy conducted by the Union County Medical Examiner's Office revealed her cause of death as asphyxiation, with blunt-force trauma contributing.

Also assisting in the investigation were the Union County Sheriff's Office, Bergen County Sheriff's Office, Morris County Prosecutor's Office, Chatham Township Police Department, and Chatham Township Volunteer Fire Department.

Rivas had his bail revoked following the verdict Monday and was taken into custody pending a sentencing hearing scheduled to take place on Friday, August 24.