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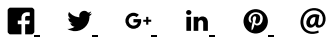
## Police: New Year's Eve murder stemmed from domestic dispute

By Kiera Blessing kblessing@eagletribune.com 14 hrs ago



AMANDA SABGA/Staff photo. Jose Urena, 49, of Lawrence, is arraigned in Lawrence District Court for the murder of Jeffrie Santana-Peguero on New Year's Eve.

Amanda Sabga



**LAWRENCE** — A city man charged in the shooting death of a man police say was his estranged wife's boyfriend was ordered held without bail following his arraignment in Lawrence District Court Thursday.

Jose Urena, 49, was arraigned on a single charge of murder in the death of 22-year-old Jeffrie Santana-Peguero on New Year's Eve. Santana-Peguero was found dead in a van on Reservoir Street shortly after 9 p.m. He had been shot five times in the head and three times in the torso, according to Assistant District Attorney Christina Ronan.

The courtroom was packed with friends and family of both the victim and the defendant. Those there on Urena's behalf declined to speak with a reporter.

Dorca Castillo, Santana-Peguero's stepmother, said her stepson was "a good guy, a hard working guy ... with a lot of plans on his life and somebody took his life for nothing."

Police arrested Urena Wednesday afternoon following an investigation that used interviews with those involved and surveillance footage from at least five locations in Lawrence to identify that a white pickup truck, similar to one registered to Urena, followed Santana-Peguero's vehicle shortly before his death and was later seen driving past the crime scene.

Investigators also found that Urena allegedly lied about his whereabouts that evening. He initially told police he dropped his daughters off at the house their mother — his estranged wife — shared with Santana-Peguero at about 8 p.m., then immediately returned to his sister's house, less than three miles away.

However, surveillance footage shows Urena returning to his sister's house just after 9 p.m. Ronan said the trip Urena told police he made should only have taken 10 to 15 minutes.

Urena's defense attorney, Murat Erkan, called the state's evidence against his client "highly circumstantial in nature" and noted that Urena "adamantly, unequivocally denies that he committed this particular homicide." Erkan requested that Urena be released on \$75,000 cash bail, but Judge Michael Uhlarik ultimately granted the prosecution's request to revoke the defendant's bail completely.

According to a police affidavit, Urena and his wife, Rosa, though still married, had separated "some time ago" and he had moved into his sister's home on Lexington Street. Urena's sister told police he had been living with her for five months.

Urena told police that his wife and Santana-Peguero had met at some point in the last year and began dating in the summer, at which point Santana-Peguero moved into the Warwick Street home Urena owned with his wife.

According to the affidavit, Rosa Urena is three-months pregnant with Santana-Peguero's child.

On New Year's Eve, Urena drove his and Rosa's daughters to the Warwick Street home about 8 p.m., court documents said. Rosa Urena gave her husband lasagna she had made him and Urena told police he immediately returned to his sister's house.

About 8:30 p.m., Santana-Peguero left Warwick Street to pick up alcohol for a New Year's Eve party. When he didn't return within an hour, Rosa Urena called her husband and asked for instructions to locate the car. Months prior to the murder, Urena had installed "an after-market GPS device to track the whereabouts of the vehicle when he began to suspect Rosa was having an affair with Jeffrie," the affidavit said.

The Urenas located the vehicle on Reservoir Street, and together drove to the scene, which had already been blockaded by police. They then drove to the police station, the documents said.

Surveillance footage from three businesses on Manchester Street shows Santana-Peguero driving down the street and making a left onto Broadway before parking and going into Broadway Liquors, according to the affidavit. Behind Santana-Peguero in each of these videos is a white pickup truck with a tan-colored panel along the bottom and a red and black strap that appears to be holding the tailgate up. A truck matching that description is registered to Urena, police said.

When Santana-Peguero stopped at Broadway Liquors, the pickup truck continued north on Broadway before driving around the block and stopping in a parking lot for a few minutes. The truck then made a right onto Manchester Street at 8:38 p.m., according to court documents.

At 8:42 p.m., Santana-Peguero left the liquor store and continued down Manchester Street toward Reservoir Street, according to police. The initial report of a disabled vehicle on that street, which would lead police to the murder scene, came in 10 minutes later, at 8:52 p.m.

Another camera in the cemetery Reservoir Street runs through caught footage of the same white pickup truck driving past the crime scene twice, about two minutes apart. Footage then shows that truck continuing down Manchester Street in the direction of Lexington Street, police said.

Though he initially told police he returned to his sister's home immediately after dropping off his daughters, Urena later conceded to investigators that he had turned into the parking lot off Manchester Street "so he could deal with his cellphone that wasn't working," according to the affidavit.

"When investigators asked Urena what his truck was doing on Reservoir Street that night, he told investigators he did not remember," the affidavit said.

Ronan emphasized that point during the arraignment, noting that "five minutes before the shooting, he doesn't remember what happened."

Erkan cast doubt on the circumstantial evidence of the case, noting that despite the police execution of three search warrants — at Warwick Street, Lexington Street, and in his vehicle — "not a scintilla of physical evidence was recovered from any of those sites that connects" Urena to the crime.

"There's not a murder weapon that's found, there's not blood anywhere, there's not DNA evidence, there's not paraffin or gunshot residue that would in any way connect him to the crime," Erkan said.

He added that the Urenas' separation was "entirely amicable" and that his client was cooperative with police, but the investigation "regrettably focused on him with very little evidence."

"Really, what we have here is proximity to the crime scene of a vehicle that is similar to the defendant's, and nothing more," he added.

Santana-Peguero's death marked the 11th murder in Lawrence in 2017, making it the deadliest year in the city on record since at least 1987, when records became available.

Urena is due back in court for a probable cause hearing on Feb. 21.

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