

# Troya sentenced to death for Turnpike slayings

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WEST PALM BEACH — A judge this morning sentenced Daniel Troya to die for the 2006 murders of two boys killed along with their parents at the side of Florida's Turnpike.

U.S. Senior District Judge Daniel T.K. Hurley handed down the death sentence, five consecutive life sentences and an additional 25 years in prison in connection with the drug ring that ultimately claimed the lives of the Escobedo family.

Troya addressed the court briefly before he was sentenced, apologizing to the victims' families, his own family and the judge before asking for Hurley's help in relaxing the high restrictions placed on him in lockup since before the trial began.

Hurley in his remarks to Troya called him a dangerous man who had no regard for human life.

"I have no confidence that Mr. Troya wouldn't do this again if the opportunity presented itself," Hurley said.

A federal jury recommended the death sentences more than a month ago for Troya and Ricardo Sanchez, capping off a three month trial and penalty phase in a case where prosecutors say Jose Luis Escobedo, his wife Yessica, and their 3 and 4-year old sons Luis Damian and Luis Julian were executed for the theft of drugs Escobedo was carrying.

Hurley, bound by the jury's decision, sentenced Troya this morning and will sentence Sanchez later today.

The case marks the first time a federal jury in Florida has sentenced someone to die since lawmakers re-enacted the federal death penalty in 1988. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stephen Carlton and John Kastrenakes told jurors the men killed the family at the behest of Danny Varela, the head of the drug ring for which Escobedo worked as a supplier.

After the sentencing, Carlton said he felt it was "a sobering punishment for a horrendous crime."

"It's not a moment to gloat over," Carlton said. "It is a solemn moment that no one takes pleasure in."

Jose Luis and Yessica's mothers, Rosario Escobedo and Sara Guerrero, were present for the sentencing and said they agreed with the judge's remarks about Troya.

"Nothing can bring back the ones that I lost," Guerrero said in Spanish. "But I'm happy about this (the sentence). This makes things a little better."

Troya's father Lorenzo after the sentencing reiterated his and his family's belief that prosecutors failed to prove to them that Troya committed the killings. The family plans to help Troya pursue his appeal, Lorenzo Troya said.

"I wasn't there that night, but we believe there was room for reasonable doubt," he said, calling Hurley's comments about his son "cruel."

Varela and two others, Liana Lee Lopez and Juan Gutierrez, will be sentenced on related drug conspiracy charges Friday. Varela is facing a mandatory life sentence. The same jury which convicted Sanchez, Troya and Varela also convicted Lopez on drug and gun charges. Gutierrez pleaded guilty to his role in the ring and never went to trial.

The jury sentenced Troya and Sanchez to life in prison for the deaths of Escobedo and his wife, but opted for the death sentence for the slayings of the two boys.