

Chester County District Attorney's Office

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NEWS RELEASE

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Mar. 14, 2022

BROTHER CHARGED WITH MANSLAUGHTER IN DEATH OF 4-YEAR-OLD IN COATESVILLE & STRAW PURCHASER ARRESTED FOR SUPPLYING GUN

The Chester County District Attorney's Office and Coatesville City Police announce the arrests of Victor Lara-Ortiz, age 18, and William Thomas, 31, in connection to the death of 4-year-old Roman Aguilera-Ortiz on Feb. 28, 2022, in Coatesville.

Lara-Ortiz was charged with involuntary manslaughter, firearms not to be carried without a license, endangering the welfare of a child, and related offenses, for leaving a loaded firearm unholstered and unsecured on his bedroom table. The victim, who died of an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, was the brother of Lara-Ortiz.

Thomas was charged with illegally purchasing and transferring the firearm to Lara-Ortiz, delivery of firearms to a minor, attempted purchases of illegal firearms, and related offenses. Both men are from Coatesville.

"For the safety of everyone, lock up your guns. This heartbreaking and tragic death of an innocent child was 100% preventable, and now a family has to live with the devastating consequences for the rest of their lives. My deepest condolences go out to them.

"Victor Lara-Ortiz's reckless and grossly negligent behavior led to the death of Roman Aguilera-Ortiz. William Thomas, a straw purchaser, illegally purchased and gave this gun to Lara-Ortiz, who was not legally permitted to own one.

“This has to stop. We will hold everyone accountable who contributes to gun violence. Given the recent increase in shootings in Coatesville, my office is doubling our efforts along with Coatesville City Police Chief Laufer to make gun-violence prevention our number one priority.”

Coatesville City Police Chief Jack Laufer said, “Throughout the investigation, the City of Coatesville Police Department and Chester County Detectives have worked closely with the family to allow them to grieve the loss of a child, while at the same time seeing that justice was served through a thorough investigation into the death of 4-year-old Roman. Today’s arrests are the result of that investigation but not the answer to the gun crime facing Coatesville and other cities. This tragedy illustrates how solutions need to involve all entities within our communities.”

The allegations in the complaint are the following¹:

Coatesville City Police and EMS were called to the 300-block of East Chestnut Street in Coatesville on Feb. 28, 2022, for the report of a child with a gunshot wound to the head. The 4-year-old was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police recovered a semi-automatic Glock model 43x pistol lying next to the victim on the floor inside Lara-Ortiz’s bedroom during a search warrant of the residence. The gun had one expended shell casing in the chamber. A magazine with several unexpended bullets was inserted into the magazine well of the gun.

Investigators learned that Lara-Ortiz had left the loaded gun unsecured and unholstered on a table in his bedroom with the door open and unlocked when he left home earlier that day. Lara-Ortiz was not home at the time of his brother’s death.

Detectives traced the gun’s serial number through the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). They discovered that the Trop Gun Shop in Gap sold it to defendant William Thomas on Feb. 15, 2022. Thomas was not allowed to license or purchase a firearm because of a prior criminal conviction. In addition,

¹ A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

investigators learned that Thomas did not provide truthful information on his firearms application. He used Lara-Ortiz's phone number instead of his own and failed to report his prior conviction.

Police learned that Thomas illegally transferred the semi-automatic Glock 43x to Lara-Ortiz the same day he purchased it. An examination of Lara-Ortiz's cell phone showed a video of Lara-Ortiz firing the Glock from a car on Feb. 16 in Valley Township.

During this investigation, police also discovered that defendant Thomas attempted to purchase two other firearms illegally. On Feb. 15, at 1:30 p.m., Thomas tried to purchase a firearm at Chester County Outdoors in Malvern, but the sale was declined after a background check. An eyewitness reported that Lara-Ortiz was present with Thomas during this incident.

On Feb. 19, Thomas attempted to purchase a firearm again at the Trop Gun Shop. The sale was denied.

MDJ Gregory Hines set bail for Lara-Ortiz at \$100,000 10% and Thomas at \$50,000 10%; both men are held at Chester County Prison. Their preliminary hearing is scheduled for Mar. 23, 2022.

Coatesville City Police and Chester County Detectives are investigating. This case is assigned to Deputy District Attorney Erin O'Brien and ADA Dan Yarnall.

Anyone with information about these cases is asked to contact Detective/Sgt Brandon Harris at 610-384-2300 ext. 3212 or Chester County Detective Keith Cowdright at 610-344-6866.