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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement Regarding the Resolution of a Case of Community Interest

This statement involves the tragic death of Mr. Mahmoud Arabi

ORANGE COUNTY (September 15, 2022) — In every case, our office endeavors to secure accountability for harms done to others, while promoting public safety and respecting the rights and humanity of all persons. Our review of the circumstances in Mr. Jose A. Ruiz’s case shows this resolution was consistent with those values and goals.

Mr. Ruiz was charged with leaving the scene of an accident that caused death. At no time was he accused of committing any criminal offense that caused the tragic death of Mr. Mahmoud Arabi. In resolving Mr. Ruiz’s case, our office weighed a number of factors, including the seriousness of the crime, the recommended guidelines sentence, the evidence showing that Mr. Ruiz was not criminally responsible for the accident that led to Mr. Arabi’s death, Mr. Ruiz’s lack of any prior criminal history, his deep remorse for his actions, the age of the case, and the probability of a successful resolution should the case proceed to trial.

The plea agreement, which involved a period of incarceration followed by probation, reflected our office’s balance of these varied factors. In particular, our office faced substantial evidentiary challenges here. Since the accident occurred in 2013, several key witnesses have become unavailable for trial. Without those witnesses, we had serious concerns about our ability to obtain a guilty verdict. By entering into this agreement, however, we could secure accountability and guarantee some penalty, including imposing upon Mr. Ruiz a felony record, a three-year driver’s license suspension, and five years of supervision on probation.

Following the entry of the plea, we discovered an error that necessitated us bringing the case back to the court to ensure the entering of the plea, was done so knowingly and voluntarily. This does not impact the sentence imposed on Mr. Ruiz, it just ensures an accurate account of the record.

We understand that Mr. Arabi’s family and members of our community are angry and in pain, and our hearts go out to them. There is no sentence that will adequately address their loss. We are truly sorry that they are disappointed about the outcome of Mr. Ruiz’s case.

Our office, however, must always operate within the confines of the law, while working to promote a fair and equitable justice system. We cannot promise that the resolution of every case will satisfy every member of the public. What we can promise is that we will resolve every case in the manner that best promotes our core values: fairness, equality, and justice.

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Seek Justice. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly.

The Office of the State Attorney for the Ninth Judicial Circuit is represented by The Honorable Monique H. Worrell and serves Orange and Osceola counties in Central Florida. A culturally diverse community, the area is home to nearly 1.4 million residents and is a vacation destination for millions each year. Our office is committed to making Orlando and the surrounding area a vibrant and safe place to live, work and play.

For general media inquiries, please contact: PIO@sao9.org.

For media records request, please contact: mediarecordsrequest@sao9.org.

For specific media inquiries pertaining to State Attorney Monique Worrell, please contact Keisha Mulfort at kmulfort@sao9.org.