



ORANGE COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

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## **Inmate released by judge in ACLU lawsuit escapes electronic monitoring, re-arrested less than 24 hours later**

**SANTA ANA, Ca. (Jan. 19, 2021):** An inmate ordered released by Orange County Judge Peter Wilson escaped at-home confinement by removing her electronic monitoring device and was re-arrested less than 24 hours later.

The inmate, Sandy Gonzalez, 28 years old, was booked into custody in March 2020 by the Fullerton Police Department for felony armed robbery, shoplifting, possession of a controlled substance, child endangerment and resisting arrest.

Gonzalez was released following a December 11, 2020 court order from Judge Wilson in a lawsuit against the Department from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Judge Wilson's order required Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes to provide a plan to release half of the inmates in the Orange County Jail due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ordered the immediate release of Gonzalez and one other individual "to provide the necessary physical distancing and other measures to protect against COVID-19." Absent the order issued by the judge, Gonzalez would not have otherwise qualified for electronic monitoring based on screening criteria and her extensive criminal history.

Gonzalez was released to the Sheriff's Department's Electronic Monitoring Program on December 13, 2020, and was ordered to remain at a specified residence with a GPS-enabled electronic monitoring device. Gonzalez was told that removal of the GPS-device would constitute a jail escape. On January 15, 2021, the Orange County Sheriff's Department Community Work Program and Custody Intelligence Unit overseeing the Electronic Monitoring Program received notification that Gonzalez had removed the electronic monitoring device and fled. The Custody Intelligence Unit launched an immediate investigation to locate Gonzalez and return her to custody.

Less than 24 hours later, the morning of January 16, 2021, investigators located Gonzalez in Long Beach, California. She was apprehended without incident and was returned to the Orange County Jail and booked on a new felony charge of escaping from jail.

"This inmate was in custody for a violent felony of robbery with a firearm, and despite numerous objections was ordered by a judge to be released," said Sheriff Barnes. "The inmate's subsequent escape from custody then required a manhunt by numerous personnel to locate her, bring her back into custody and return her to jail, where she should have remained in the first place. The known risks to the community associated with the court ordered release demonstrates a blatant disregard for the public's safety."

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sheriff has utilized the discretion available to him during a declared emergency to release more than 1,500 inmates with less than 180 days left on their sentence who pose the lowest risk to the community. In addition, the Department has gone over and above CDC guidelines to mitigate COVID-19 in the Orange County Jail. The Department has mitigated a recent outbreak of COVID-19 in the Orange County Jail from a height of more than 1,200 COVID-19 positive inmates in December 2020 to 139 current cases today.

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