

Jackie Lacey
District Attorney
<http://da.lacounty.gov>



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Sarah Ardalani
Public Information Officer
213-257-2000
SArdalani@da.lacounty.gov
Twitter: @LADAOOffice

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**Couple Found with Child's Body in San Diego
Charged in Los Angeles County**

A Whittier couple has been charged with murder, torture and other felony counts in connection with a child's body discovered in a duffle bag while the two were attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexican border, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office announced.

Mercy Mary Becerra, 43, and Johnny Lewis Hartley, 39, are expected to be arraigned Friday in Department 30 at the Foltz Criminal Justice Center.

The defendants are each charged with four felony counts in case BA450379: murder, human trafficking to commit pimping/pandering, torture and assault on a child causing death. The felony complaint for arrest warrant was filed on Sept. 27.

Deputy District Attorney Lisa Coen of the Sex Crimes Division is assigned to the case.

Prosecutors said Becerra and Hartley allegedly trafficked a woman between November 2012 and August 2016.

In that time, the defendants reportedly seized the woman's daughter, severely abused the child and ultimately killed the minor victim on or about Aug. 9, according to prosecutors.

On Aug. 9, Becerra and Hartley attempted to cross the San Ysidro Port of Entry with the child's body in a duffle bag, but the defendants were stopped by authorities and taken into custody, prosecutors said.

If convicted as charged, each defendant faces a maximum possible sentence of life in state prison.

The case is being investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Whittier and San Diego police departments.

About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.