



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 24, 2017

Trial Begins for Illegal Immigrant Who Killed Kate Steinle

The trial of Mexican immigrant José Inez García Zárate (shown) for shooting Kate Steinle in July 2015 [began Monday morning](#) in San Francisco. At issue will be only whether Zárate (also known as Juan Francisco López-Sánchez, or Francisco Sánchez) shot Steinle intentionally or accidentally. If the jury finds him guilty, Zárate faces 15 years to life in prison.



Opening remarks by Kate's father, Jim, were presented to the jury through tears. He and his daughter were walking on Pier 14, a popular destination, when he heard a loud "bang" and Kate collapsed into his arms. As he laid her down, he noticed a bullet hole in her back. The bullet pierced her aorta, and she died in a hospital two hours later. His testimony lasted 10 minutes, and Zárate's attorney declined to question him.

Zárate's defense attorney, Matt Gonzalez, claimed that his client did indeed fire the round that hit Steinle, but that it was an accident. According to Gonzalez, Zárate, homeless at the time, had found some sleeping pills in a dumpster and was under their influence when he found a handgun under a bench on the pier wrapped in a T-shirt. In the process of unfolding the T-shirt, the gun went off, sending the fatal round into Steinle's back.

The incident set off national debates over immigration, gun laws, holds by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), and sanctuary cities. Zárate had been deported from the United States five times and his record shows seven felony convictions. He had just recently completed a prison sentence for illegal entry when he was transferred to the San Francisco County jail to face a 20-year-old marijuana charge. When that charge was dropped, the sheriff released Zárate despite knowing that ICE officials had requested that he be detained for deportation. The sheriff claimed that since San Francisco is a sanctuary city that severely limits cooperation with ICE, he was just following local rules by releasing Zárate.

The judge in the case has made certain that none of these issues will be brought up during the trial. It will instead focus entirely on whether Zárate's story of just happening to find a gun under a bench wrapped in a T-shirt that went off accidentally while he was handling it will withstand the light of day. If it does, and the jury believes Zárate, he could avoid prison. On the other hand, if the jury finds Zárate guilty of murder in the second degree, he will once again return to prison, perhaps for the rest of his life.

The New American will be following the case and will provide updates as the trial proceeds.

Photo: AP Images



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An Ivy League graduate and former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at [LightFromTheRight.com](#), primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelmann@thenewamerican.com.



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