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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Re: **Manuel Gerard Vargas**

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MODESTO, CALIFORNIA – Stanislaus County District Attorney James Brazelton announced today that Manuel Gerard Vargas, age 22, of Modesto, was convicted this week in two separate cases of several felony offenses and sentenced to eight years in state prison. Deputy District Attorney Beth O'Hara prosecuted the cases for the People.

On January 16th 2004, Vargas was arrested by the California Highway Patrol for possessing over 3 grams of methamphetamine and a methamphetamine pipe. While out on bail in the first case, on February 26th, 2004, Vargas was stopped by Modesto Police Department speeding in front of El Vista school while children were present. He gave a false name to the police and it was later determined he had a suspended license and a warrant for his arrest. Vargas' vehicle, a 1995 Nissan Quest, had a "punched" ignition and the door lock was broken. Police investigated and discovered the car had been stolen from Watsonville the night before.

While preparing to tow the van, officers found a teddy bear inside. MPD Officer Taylor became curious when he lifted the toy and felt how heavy it was. Once the officers tore open the bear, 28 separately packaged balls of heroin were discovered. Each ball was approximately one ounce, and the packages totaled almost 1 & 3/4 pound of heroin. with a street value ranging from \$25,000.00 to \$100,000.00. Defendant made statements to witnesses that he took the van and that he was selling the drugs from the teddy bear.

On Tuesday, July 27th, Vargas was found guilty by a Stanislaus County Superior court jury of possessing methamphetamine and giving a false name to police officers. On Wednesday, the day his second jury trial was to begin, Vargas instead pleaded guilty to all charges including: transporting and possessing heroin for sales, car theft, possessing stolen property, giving a false name to police, and an enhancement for committing a crime while out on bail. Stanislaus Superior Court Judge John Whiteside denied probation and sentenced Vargas to eight years in state prison.