



Attorney General Jon Bruning

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# News Release

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## **Camacho Sentenced to Life in Prison for Raping and Murdering Three-Year-Old Girl**

LINCOLN - Attorney General Jon Bruning today announced Melecio Camacho de Jesus, 30, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the 2009 rape and murder of three-year-old Evelyn Verdugo Paniagua. The three-judge panel rejected the State's recommendation that Camacho be sentenced to death for brutally raping and murdering Evelyn in her Sioux City home.

"We disagree with the panel's decision to allow Mr. Camacho to live out his full life behind bars," said Bruning. "Mr. Camacho took little Evelyn from her bed, raped her and smothered her until she died. He ended an innocent child's life through horrific acts of brutality. We believe the atrocity of these crimes called for the ultimate sentence."

In June 2010, a Dakota County jury found Camacho guilty of the first-degree murder of the three-year-old. The jury also determined the death sentence should be considered due to the crime's aggravated or "especially heinous, atrocious, or cruel" nature.

Pursuant to statute regarding capital crimes, two judges were appointed by the Nebraska Supreme Court to serve on the mandatory three-judge sentencing panel with Dakota County District Judge William Binkard. After Binkard's January 2011 retirement, Judge John Murphy was added to the panel.

### ***Case History***

On May 23, 2009, Evelyn's parents took her to Mercy Medical Center after discovering the child unresponsive and clearly the victim of an attack.

At 4:25 a.m., efforts to revive the child were ceased. A blood-gas test showed that she hadn't been breathing in some time.

At trial, the trauma nurse from Mercy Medical Center testified Evelyn had bruising on the left side of her face and fingerprint marks by her ear, chin and mouth. She also had red pinpoint marks around her eyelids and on her eyes, which indicated a lack of oxygen

or asphyxiation. She noted blood in the child's underwear and tears to her rectum. As medical personnel performed CPR, blood came from her genitals.

Evelyn's 7-year-old brother, who shared a room with her, pretended to sleep through the attack and later provided information to police that identified Camacho de Jesus as the suspect. Camacho had previously stayed as a houseguest of the family. Camacho later confessed to the crime at Sioux City police headquarters.

In September 2009, he pleaded not guilty to charges of first-degree capital murder and burglary.

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