

14-year-old Maryland girl found dead in creek had been beaten and stabbed in MS-13 killing, police say

By Lynn Bari
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A 14-year-old girl found dead in a creek in Maryland had been stabbed with a machete and beaten with a baseball bat by a group of teens worried she would tell police about a crime the group had committed, police said.

Three teens — including another 14-year-old girl — have been arrested and charged as adults with first-degree murder, Prince George’s County police announced Thursday, describing the death as an MS-13- related killing.

Investigators are working to identify a fourth person suspected to be involved in the slaying of Ariana Funes-Diaz, of Adelphi, police said.

The killing, police allege, occurred because the four suspects feared Funes-Diaz intended to go to police with information about a crime she and the suspects reportedly had been involved in on April 17 in the District.

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Funes-Diaz’s body was discovered about 10 a.m. Wednesday in a wooded area in the 6300 block of 64th Ave. in Riverdale, about one month after she was killed, police said. Law enforcement located her after the Prince George’s County gang unit received information about a possible killing that occurred in April, said Maj. Brian Reilly, commander of the police department’s criminal investigation division.

Reilly did not detail what crime the group allegedly participated in last month, directing questions to police in the District, who declined to comment through a spokesman.

After the incident in the District, Reilly said the teens involved conspired to kill Funes-Diaz. “They were afraid that she was going to go to the police department,” Reilly said.

The teens drove Funes-Diaz to an apartment complex in Riverdale and walked her to a wooded area nearby before assaulting her with a baseball bat and machete in a “very brutal attack,” Reilly said.

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1 of blunt force trauma, police said.

“This is not two gangs that are warring with each other,” Reilly said. “This is a gang that turned on its associate.”

The teens arrested are Josue Fuentes-Ponce, 16, of Bladensburg; Joel Escobar, 17, of Northeast Washington; and Cynthia Hernandez-Nucamendi, 14, of Lothian. Online court records did not list an attorney for them. Escobar and Hernandez-Nucamendi are in the county jail being held without bond and Ponce is at a youth detention center, police said.

Fuentes-Ponce and Escobar are members of MS-13 from the “Sailors” clique, according to Reilly, which operates mostly out of Prince George’s County. Hernandez-Nucamendi and Funes-Diaz had earlier been reported missing out of Anne Arundel County, police said.

The killing of Funes-Diaz comes about two months after police arrested six people in the slaying of 16-year-old Jacson Chicas. The boy was stabbed more than 100 times by MS-13 members at a house in Prince George’s before his body was dumped near a river in Stafford, Va., and set on fire, police said.

Chicas was killed March 8 during a meeting at the home of a gang leader who runs an MS-13 clique that operates out of Fairfax County, Va., police said. At the meeting, gang members were being disciplined and the clique leader, who has since been arrested, had questioned Chicas’s “loyalty to the gang,” charging documents state.

“It’s violence that’s disturbing,” Reilly said, “and they’re not afraid to use it on their own to send a message.”

Peter Hermann contributed to this article.

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