

## ASBURY PARK MAN SENTENCED TO 5 YEARS IN PRISON FOR TORTURING, KILLING PET CAT

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[MARK SPIVEY](#) — [JUNE 14, 2024](#)

FREEHOLD – A local man has been sentenced to five years in state prison for torturing and killing his pet cat last year, Monmouth County Prosecutor Raymond S. Santiago announced Friday.

Bani J. Mezquititla, 19, of Asbury Park will also have to pay restitution for the cost of the cat's necropsy and comply with an order permanently banning him from ever again owning, living with, or having custody over any animal, according to the terms set down during a hearing yesterday before Monmouth County Superior Court Judge Chad N. Cagan.

An investigation into Mezquititla's activities was initiated in March 2023, when a concerned citizen brought the body of a dead cat to Asbury Park Police Department headquarters.

Members of that agency and the Monmouth County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Humane Law Enforcement Division determined that the cat had belonged to Mezquititla, who first performed sexual acts on the animal, seriously injuring it. He also later restrained and tortured the cat, resulting in its death.

Mezquititla was located and arrested on the same day the investigation was initiated, then transported to the Monmouth County Correctional Institution (MCCI). He has remained incarcerated there as the case has progressed, as a motion by the State to keep him detained was granted.

In April 2024, Mezquititla pleaded guilty to charges of Animal Cruelty by Tormenting, Torturing, or Unnecessarily or Cruelly Abusing a Living Animal, Resulting in its Death, and Animal Cruelty by Using or Causing or Procuring the Use of an Animal or Creature in Any Kind of Sexual Manner, both third-degree crimes.

"It is virtually impossible to conceive of an instance of animal cruelty reflective of greater depths of depravity than this," Prosecutor Santiago said. "Thanks to a diligent investigation and prosecution, yesterday's sentencing marked one of the most substantial criminal penalties for an offense of this nature ever seen in the State of New Jersey. It is the maximum sentence one can receive under the law. We strongly feel that this outcome serves the interests of justice, and hope that the numerous individuals from across the country who have reached out urging us to win justice for Ellie are similarly satisfied."

This case was prosecuted by Monmouth County Assistant Prosecutors Keri-Leigh Schaefer and Sevan Biramian.