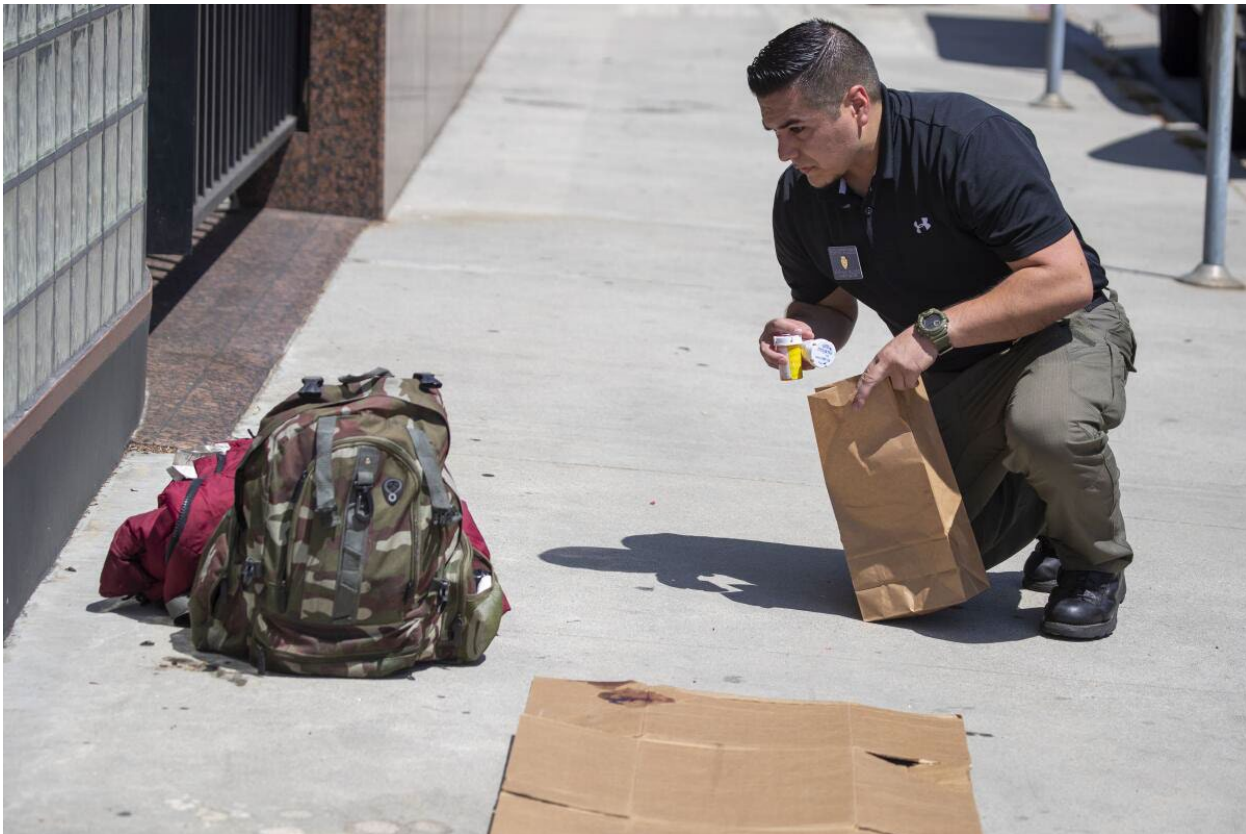


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CALIFORNIA

L.A. County coroner investigator charged with thefts of necklace and rare coins from bodies



Adrian Munoz, an investigator with the Los Angeles County medical examiner-coroner, shown in 2019, has been charged with stealing valuables from bodies.

(Allen J. Schaben / Los Angeles Times)

BY [REBECCA ELLIS](#),
[STEVE LOPEZ](#)

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An investigator with the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner has been charged with stealing a gold necklace and rare coins from two dead people while on the job.

The Los Angeles County district attorney's office announced Wednesday that Adrian Muñoz, 34, has been charged with one felony count of grand theft and one misdemeanor count of petty theft. Muñoz had been with the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner since 2018, according to the county's salary [database](#).

Prosecutors said Muñoz stole a gold crucifix necklace off the body of a warehouse worker who died of a heart attack on the job this January. After the family reported the theft, investigators searched Muñoz's desk and found antique coins along with a receipt that belonged to a man whose death he had investigated in November of last year.

Kristopher Gay, the deputy district attorney handling the case, said an investigation is still ongoing and it's possible more alleged thefts could come to light.

"He's been involved in many cases," he said at a news conference announcing the charge. "How many potential victims there could be I can't say."

Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Odey Ukpo said he was "very disappointed" and had suspended Muñoz Tuesday.

"We rely on the trust of the community," he said. "Certainly, this will have shaken that trust."

The suspension comes roughly 11 months after the family of one of the victims, Miguel Solorio, said they first asked the medical examiner's office about the loss of the necklace.

Solorio had been a roughly 10-year employee of Hylands, working in a warehouse where homeopathic products were loaded, unloaded, managed and shipped.

An employee of Hylands, who asked for anonymity for fear of retribution, told The Times that Muñoz had been called to take care of Solorio's body. According to the employee, a

security camera at the warehouse caught Muñoz removing the necklace from the body, placing it in a glove and then slipping it into his medical bag. The footage also showed Muñoz taking cash from the front pocket of the man's pants and, again, slipping it into a glove in his medical bag.

Rosalba Solorio, Miguel's daughter-in-law, who also worked at Hylands, said a representative of the district attorney's office had called the family to tell them that Muñoz had been arrested.

"We're happy the investigation didn't just fall through the cracks," she said. "They actually did something about it and hopefully we'll see justice for my father-in-law."

She said her father-in-law had worn the distinctive gold necklace for a few decades.

"Everybody knew he had it — he was recognized for it," she said of the cross, which she said had more sentimental value than monetary value.

She said losing Solorio had broken her husband and mother-in-law.

"Finding out what happened with the chain was insult to injury," she said. "Somebody who should be helping the family did this, and it's just unexplainable."

Solorio said her father-in-law often carried cash with him as well. When the family inquired as to what happened to the necklace and the cash, they were told that nothing was found on the body. She said they were later told the necklace was available, but when her husband and mother-in-law went to retrieve it at the medical examiner's office, the necklace they were handed was not Solorio's.

She said the necklace has still not been returned to them.



[Rebecca Ellis](#)

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Rebecca Ellis covers Los Angeles County government for the Los Angeles Times. Previously, she covered Portland city government for Oregon Public Broadcasting. Before OPB, Ellis wrote for the Miami Herald, freelanced for the Providence Journal and reported as a Kroc fellow at NPR in Washington, D.C. She graduated from Brown University in 2018. She was named a finalist for the 2022 Livingston Awards for her investigation into abuses within Portland’s private security industry.



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Steve Lopez is a California native who has been a Los Angeles Times columnist since 2001. He has won more than a dozen national journalism awards and is a four-time Pulitzer finalist. Lopez is the author most recently of “Independence Day: What I Learned About Retirement, From Some Who’ve Done It and Some Who Never Will.” His book “The Soloist,” inspired by his columns on his relationship with a Juilliard-trained homeless person, was a Los Angeles Times and New York Times best-seller, winner of the PEN USA Literary Award for Non-Fiction, and the subject of a Dream Works movie by the same name. He has also written three novels and two column collections.