



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
COUNTY OF TULARE

Tim Ward, *District Attorney*

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**PRESS RELEASE**

1/4/19

**KNIFE ATTACK LEADS TO THIRD STRIKE, LIFE SENTENCE**

Yesterday in Department 6 of the Tulare County Superior Court, Visalia Division, Judge Gary Paden sentenced Robert Lee Stephens, age 48, of Visalia, to 36 years-to-life in prison for a third strike offense. On September 12, 2018, Stephens was convicted of one count of assault with a deadly weapon (knife), a strike offense.

Stephens possesses prior strikes for armed robbery in 1995 and corporal injury to a spouse with the use of a weapon (metal rod) in 2004. Stephens has additional prior felony convictions for child abuse, evading an officer, and escaping from custody.

On June 29, 2018, Stephens walked in to a Visalia auto shop office with a butcher knife and metal pipe and demanded to know the location of an unknown person. A shop employee told him that no one else was in the building. Stephens then walked out of the shop and paced in the street in front of the business for a short time. He then re-entered the business with the knife above his head. During this, the shop employee called 911 and retrieved a baseball bat for self-defense. Stephens made a lunging motion with the knife at the employee, but backed down when confronted with the baseball bat and was taken into custody outside shortly after. Stephens told officers that he was looking for his ex-wife and her boyfriend who he believed were hiding at the location.

The case was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Kelly Habroun and investigated by Officer Nate Henry of the Visalia Police Department.

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