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The Fresno Bee



Assemblyman entered rehab amid divorce: 'I needed some help'

BY MELISSA MONTALVO AND THADDEUS MILLER
mmontalvo@fresnobee.com
tmiller@fresnobee.com

A Fresno lawmaker vying for a City Council seat checked himself into a rehabilitation program to cope with job stress and prevent alcohol and drug abuse, court records say.

Assemblymember Dr. Joaquin Arambula, D-Fresno, said in a signed Feb. 13 declaration to the court that he entered the voluntary inpatient program Jan. 7 designed to provide him skills to cope with stress.



Joaquin Arambula

He wrote in court filings that he completed the program Feb. 6.

"I just felt I needed some help to adjust and to make sure that I did not become dependent on alcohol or marijuana," he said in the declaration.

His wife, Elizabeth Arambula, filed for divorce on Jan. 26. The Bee obtained court filings related to the divorce from the Fresno County Superior Court.

Arambula noted he has no criminal or psychiatric history, and chose to join on his own without an intervention.

But his wife said in divorce-related court filings that he had a history of "substance abuse and gaming addiction."

In a statement shared after this story's publication, Arambula elaborated on his decision to enter rehab.

"I voluntarily entered into and successfully completed a 30-day rehab because I recognized I had a problem, and I chose to improve my life and be a better father for our children," he said. "This is a very trying time for

SEE ASSEMBLYMAN, 2A

Immigrants in Kern Co. challenge detentions at record rates

BY MELISSA MONTALVO AND MARINA PEÑA
mmontalvo@fresnobee.com
mpeña@fresnobee.com

Immigrants held in Kern County-based ICE facilities are challenging their detention in federal court at some of the highest rates nationwide.

The Eastern District of California, which encompasses the Central Valley and is home to three of the state's seven ICE detention centers, has the sec-

ond-highest concentration of habeas corpus petitions nationwide, data shows.

An estimated 2,061 writ of habeas corpus petitions have been filed in the Eastern District of California since January 2025, according to an analysis by nonprofit investigative newsroom ProPublica.

Immigration lawyers using this strategy nationwide are successfully getting their clients out of ICE custody, according to staff attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union

of Northern California.

"ICE doesn't have to operate this way. It's clearly in violation of the law. They're losing cases over and over again," Bree Bernwanger, senior staff attorney with the ACLU of Northern California, said in an interview.

A petition for a writ of habeas corpus is a legal procedure challenging an unlawful deprivation of liberty, most commonly illegal detention or incarceration. The legal principle dates back to English common

law and has long served as a check on executive authority. In the United States, habeas corpus allows federal courts to review whether a person's detention complies with the U.S. Constitution and federal law and to order release if it does not. In immigration cases, habeas petitions are often used to challenge prolonged or unjustified detention, Bernwanger said.

The Eastern District of California is one of the largest districts in the country, extending 87,000 square miles from the Oregon border in the north to Bakersfield in the south. The district includes nearly eight million residents and six large urban areas: Sacramento, Fresno, Bakersfield, Stockton, Vallejo and Fairfield, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Between Golden State Annex

SEE IMMIGRANTS, 2A



CAMERON CLARK Sacramento Bee file

One of Sacramento Regional Transit's new low-floor trains is demonstrated to the media at SacRT's heavy rail facility May 3, 2023.

Fresno has 'unique opportunity' to boost transit with light rail

BY ERIK GALICIA
egalicia@fresnobee.com

Depending on what a study finds feasible for Fresno, and what future local elected officials decide, it's possible a light rail system could one day connect downtown to various parts of the Fresno-Clovis metropolitan area.

There could be a line from downtown to the growing Fresno Yosemite International Airport. Or one along the Fresno Area Express Q route, the service's highest-ridership bus line that already connects downtown to everything on Blackstone Avenue — all the way north to the River Park Shopping Center.

Would the connectivity help the growth and revitalization of downtown Fresno?

"There's been a big debate



CRAIG KOHLRUSS ckohlru@fresnobee.com

The iconic Fresno postage stamp mural by late Fresno muralist FranCisko Vargas faces north, with downtown Fresno behind it, on May 30, 2023.

around suburban sprawl in our community," said Paul Herman, deputy director of the Fresno Council of Governments. "I think transit services in general help contribute to

promoting inward growth."

The COG is expected to begin a feasibility study this summer into an urban light rail system for the Fresno-Clovis metropolitan area. Identifying

development opportunities along potential corridors will be a key component of the study, Herman said. That includes developments that are key to downtown Fresno's revitalization, he said, such as ones that use existing city lots, serve more people and have multiple uses.

Another COG study already underway is also looking at the possibility of a light rail system that would use existing train tracks to connect downtown Fresno to multiple smaller cities in Fresno and Tulare counties — as far as Firebaugh to the west, Kingsburg to the south and the Tulare County city of Dinuba to the southeast.

The idea is those traveling to Fresno via light rail would arrive at the downtown California high-speed rail station, which is

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