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Roberto Cordova holds a photograph of his late son, Isaiah Vialpando, on Aug. 19. ZACHARY ALLEN/THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

‘You’re not alone’

Parents of Isaiah Vialpando form support group for families of murder victims

Justin Reutter Pueblo Chieftain | USA TODAY NETWORK

More than a decade after their son’s death, the parents of Isaiah Vialpando are creating a support group for Pueblo families of murder victims. • “When Isaiah was first killed, we went to a support group called the Parents of Murdered Children, and it’s a national chapter, one of the best nonprofit organizations,” said Robert Cordova, father of Vialpando, who was shot and killed in 2015.

“You can go to therapy, and our priest helped us a lot, but when we went to that meeting, we actually had a share session with people in similar circumstances, where they lost their children. It really helped (Isaiah’s mother, Melissa Vialpando) and me out, and it makes you understand you’re not alone,” Cordova said.

“When something like this happens, it makes you feel like it’s the end of the world and no one understands the pain you go through. But when you go to a meeting like this, and you share, then you feel like, you know what? I’m not alone. And all this horrible sadness, you hear it from others, it makes you heal and makes you understand you’re not alone.”

Cordova expressed that while most



Isaiah Vialpando and his parents Robert Cordova and Melissa Vialpando.

PROVIDED BY THE VIALPANDO FAMILY

people do their best to understand what families experience, they cannot, even professionals such as therapists.

“It’s not their fault — they give you

coping skills and try to understand, but unless you lost a loved one or a child through a murder, you can’t understand,” he said. “There are several people, and we love them all, that say, ‘Oh, we understand how you feel,’ but in reality, you don’t. It’s the most horrible feeling in the world.”

Over the years, the Cordovas have created a legacy for their son through the Isaiah Vialpando Memorial Scholarship, the Isaiah Vialpando Memorial Vica Run, and, last year, a turkey giveaway for Thanksgiving.

“But this is near and dear to our hearts, that we wanted to start a support group here,” Cordova said.

Cordova said he feels there is not

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ERBOCES prepares to dissolve after vote

Controversial group opened ‘public Christian school’

Ann Schimke
Chalkbeat Colorado

An education group that last year authorized “Colorado’s first public Christian school” soon will dissolve, following a Monday night vote by a key member institution.

The school board in School District 49 unanimously approved the dissolution of Education reEnvisioned Board of Cooperative Educational Services, or ERBOCES.

Monday’s vote represents a major turnabout from two months ago, when the District 49 board briefly considered dropping out of the co-op but opted to stay another year. After 13 years of existence, ERBOCES leaves a legacy of school choice advocacy and a long string of controversies.

The change of fortune for ERBOCES comes after growing scrutiny by state education officials, who this month cracked down on the co-op over what they said was an improperly constituted board, invalid contracts, and mis-spent state money.

In addition to launching the “public Christian school,” called Riverstone Academy, ERBOCES has created dozens of publicly funded homeschool enrichment programs in the last few years. The flood of programs, including some that paid for ski passes and sports camps and others that subsidized private schools, drew the ire of state lawmakers last spring.

ERBOCES is one of 21 such public education co-ops in Colorado. Most are composed of several school districts that band together to provide services such as special education. ERBOCES has operated differently, opening schools and programs that serve students across the state.

About a dozen parents, students, and homeschool program providers spoke at Monday’s meeting, with several urging the board to help homeschool enrichment programs that are now in limbo and prevent students from being “collateral damage.” Others said dissolving ERBOCES will help the district avoid reputational damage.

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Former Pueblo cop gets 90 days in jail for child sexual exploitation

Justin Reutter

Pueblo Chieftain
USA TODAY NETWORK

A former Pueblo police officer was sentenced to 90 days in jail and five years of probation after being convicted of three counts of sexual exploitation of a child in May.

Gerardo Mejia, who worked for the Pueblo Police Department for two years prior to being arrested by the FBI in January 2025, will also be required to complete 250 hours of community service and register as a sex offender, according to court documents.

According to closing statements made in Mejia’s jury trial, the charges

stemmed from text messages between Mejia and someone who went by the name “Mariah,” who was actually another man being federally prosecuted for possession of child sexual abuse materials (CSAM).

Mejia received two images showing sexual acts being performed on a child victim, one on May 7 and one on June 4, 2024, and exchanged text messages with the other individual, who sent explicit texts between April 22, 2024, and Jan. 30, 2025, when Mejia was arrested, prosecutors said.

In the messages, Mejia asked the other individual to record and send him CSAM. Mejia told the other person where to send the materials, including

telling them “not to send it to his work phone.”

During an interview with police, Mejia confirmed he had received the images, according to Shelby Crow, a deputy district attorney for the 4th Judicial District.

Comments made by Mejia in the text messages indicated he was aware that the victim was a minor, Crow said. In one message, Mejia said to “Mariah” that he “wished (the images of the victim) were you when you were little.”

Mejia was convicted on all three counts by a jury in May.

Another former Pueblo law enforcement officer, Andrew Ward, who

worked as a transportation deputy for the Pueblo County Sheriff’s Office, is scheduled for a plea and sentencing hearing on Sept. 25 after allegedly sexually assaulting two children and being found in possession of up to 1 million files of children being sexually abused.

Details of Ward’s potential plea agreement have not yet been publicly disclosed.

Justin Reutter covers public safety, county government, and business news for the Pueblo Chieftain. Contact Justin at jreutterma@gannett.com or follow him on X @jayreutter1. Support local news; subscribe to the Pueblo Chieftain at subscribe.chieftain.com.

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