

**From:** Jennifer Rakowski <rakowskij@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 12, 2025 9:00 PM  
**To:** Justin Long <jlong@alamedaca.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Permanent Memorial For Mario Gonzalez

Dear Park and Rec Director Long and Commissioners

I am writing to advocate for a permanent memorial bench for Mario Gonzalez at the pocket park off Otis and Park St. This memorial would not only honor Mario's memory but also serve as a powerful symbol of healing and restorative justice.

It is crucial to consider the wishes of Mario's family: Edith Arenales, brothers Efrain and Jerry and son Mario Jr. They have expressed a heartfelt desire for a permanent place where they, along with friends and community members, can gather to remember Mario. For 4 years, the community and family have cared for the Mario Gonzalez memorial altar. The Mario Gonzalez Memorial has long been recognized on Google Maps, Waze.com and Apple Maps it's overdue for the city to do the same. It is shameful that the city acted instead to try to erase its presence.

While expression of grief, concern and protest have taken place around the island, illuminating the side of the Alameda Theater, at the Healing Garden, at Crown Beach, and in the window of many homes across the island, the clear community focus has been at the parklet off Otis. In gatherings large and small, community members have spoken out, prayed, danced, planted flowers and lit candles in remembrance on Mario. We have gathered on Mario's birthday, his anniversary, important holidays and quiet moments of reflection. Community members have discussed police reform, given "the talk" to family members and reflected on personal experiences of force by Alameda police all at the parklet. We have listened to bird songs, found rainbows and watched sunsets at the site. Hundreds of dollars have been spent at Encinal Nursery, Ploughshares Nursery, Safeway and Trader Joe's on plants and flowers for the memorial. The very first vigil on April 21st 2021, was the same night that the police reform taskforces were celebrating wrapping up their formal work with the city. Some taskforce members skipped the celebration or left it early to join in the vigil. Mario's death and this city's response are a part of Alameda city history.

The case surrounding Mario Gonzalez garnered both national and international attention, covered by CNN, NPR, New York Times, LA Times, BBC Al Jazeera, The Guardian, Reuters, Associated Press, Univision, France 24, Telemundo and Deutsche Welle. The families of Steven Taylor, Angelo Quinto, Dajuan Armstrong, Augie Gonzalez, Eric Salgado, who also lost loved ones at the hands of law enforcement, have all gathered at the memorial in solidarity.

It is vital to recognize that very few police-involved deaths result in any level of criminal prosecution, adding urgency to our call for change. In Mario Gonzalez's case, criminal prosecution got farther than it did in the deaths of Eric Gardner, Tamir Rice, Micheal Brown, Phillandro Castile, Alton Sterling, or Breanna Taylor. Many of these also

involved smaller civil court settlements. The vast majority of death by law enforcement do not result in officers leaving law enforcement. Using any of these outcomes to justify not allowing a memorial bench is both cruel and unbecoming of the values this city preports to uphold. By supporting this memorial, we can honor not only Mario's families wishes but a broader community need for reconciliation.

Lastly, some have suggested allowing the memorial to become perminant would create a painful reminder not wanted by some neighbors or police. As a neighbor, I will acknowledge it can be a hard place to walk or drive past, but that wound opened up in April 2021 and projecting that pain onto a memorial bench, an act of love, is misplaced.

I urge Director Long and the Park and Rec Commission to support the establishment of a permanent memorial bench for Mario Gonzalez at the park on Otis. It would be a meaningful way to honor his memory, echo the wishes of his family, and contribute to ongoing conversations around justice and healing within our community.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rakowski