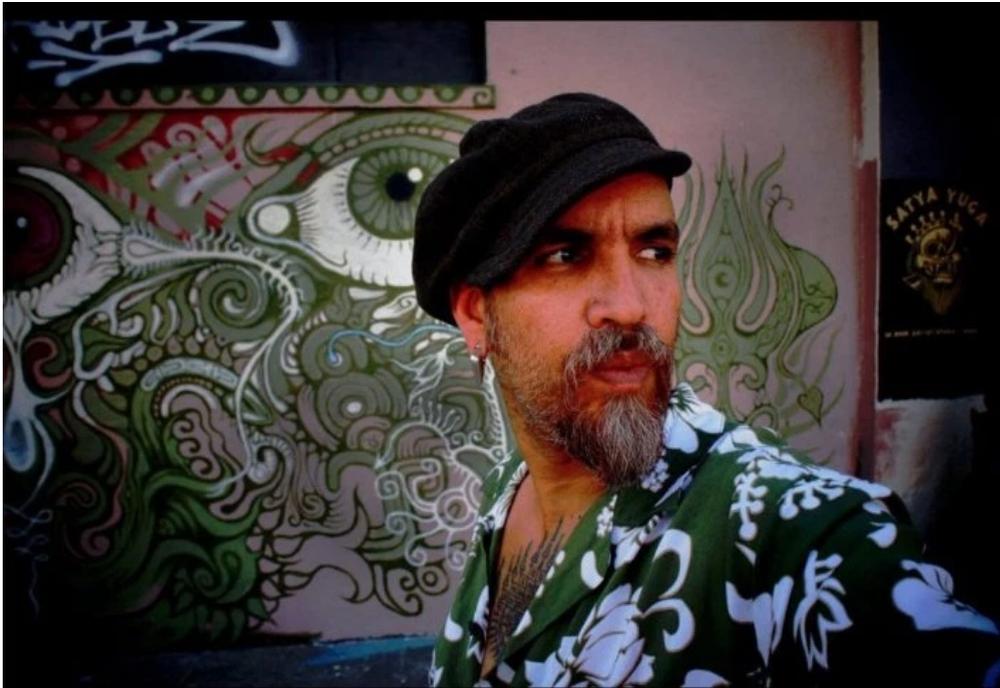


OPINION > EDITORIALS • Editorial

Editorial: Ghost Ship plea deal would be a travesty of justice

Derick Almena, the master tenant of the warehouse, would serve just three years in jail for the deaths of 36 people



(Facebook)

Derick Almena leased the nearly 10,000-square-foot warehouse and then turned around and rented out makeshift living quarters within it to people desperate for affordable shelter.

By [MERCURY NEWS & EAST BAY TIMES EDITORIAL BOARDS](#) |

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Thirty-six people died in the 2016 Ghost Ship inferno. Thirty-six. It was the deadliest single-structure fire in modern California history.

Derick Almena, the master tenant of the Oakland warehouse artist compound, the person most responsible for the deadly blaze, last month [pleaded guilty](#) to three dozen counts of involuntary manslaughter.

The plea was part of a deal under which prosecutors agreed to his walking away after having served just three years in jail for crimes that carry a maximum of 39 years in prison.

That's a travesty of justice.

On March 8, Alameda County Judge Trina Thompson will decide whether to accept the plea deal. She should reject it. Just as another judge rejected [a similar deal](#) in 2018 because of Almena's lack of remorse and deflection of blame.

The only thing that's changed since then was a trial, in which a jury deadlocked 10-2 in favor of conviction. District Attorney Nancy O'Malley should have never agreed to the latest deal. If she couldn't have gotten a tougher sentence agreement, she should have taken the case to trial again.

The families of the victims deserve better. The community deserves it. Justice deserves it.

Although the deal calls for a prison sentence of 12 years, Almena isn't expected to return to Santa Rita Jail or any other lockup because of the nearly three years he has already served and credit for good behavior. He will likely continue to wear an ankle monitor for another 1½ years in his Lake County home, followed by three years' supervised probation.

When prosecutors last month told relatives of the victims about the deal, "our jaws dropped," said Colleen Dolan, whose daughter, Chelsea Faith Dolan, [died in the inferno](#). "It was the last thing we thought they would tell us. We thought they were going to tell us the dates the trial would resume."

They had good reason to be shocked. If it weren't for Almena, their loved ones would be alive today.

Almena leased the nearly 10,000-square-foot warehouse and then turned around and rented out makeshift living quarters within it to people desperate for affordable shelter. He allowed the warehouse to be filled with flammable objects that ignited quickly the night of the fire, trapping people who were there for a dance party. He ignored, and even [laughed at](#), warnings about the dangers.



The warehouse had [no permits](#) for residential occupancy or for using it as an event venue. No sprinklers or fire alarms. No fire escape. It had a makeshift stairwell built out of wood pallets. Wall-to-wall furniture. Sparking electrical wires.

An electrician who did work at Ghost Ship told this newspaper that a wire ran from a neighboring business. “You could hear the electrical feed vibrating in the pipe, it was so hot,” [Jake Jacobitz said](#). “Everything in there was illegal. (Almena) has been told so many times, but he doesn’t care.”

To conceal the residential use of the property, Almena reportedly [directed tenants](#) to hide bedding and cooking supplies when the landlord came by. He created the deadly conditions — and tried to cover them up.

This isn’t about vengeance or retribution. This is about ensuring the punishment fits the crime. Right now, it clearly doesn’t.

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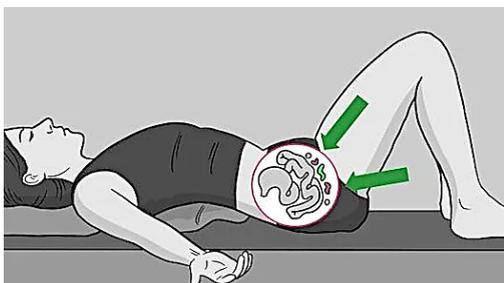
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