

Date of Hearing:

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

ACR 124 (Pellerin) – As Introduced January 12, 2024

SUBJECT: Sergeant Damon Christopher Gutzwiller Memorial Highway

SUMMARY: Designates the portion of State Route 9 between Lower Glen Arbor Road, at postmile SCR 8.13, to Western Avenue, at postmile SCR 11.131, in the County of Santa Cruz as the Sergeant Damon Christopher Gutzwiller Memorial Highway. The measure would also request the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to determine the cost of appropriate signs showing this special designation and, upon receiving donations from nonstate sources sufficient to cover the cost, erect those signs.

EXISTING LAW: Assigns Caltrans the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways. This includes the installation and maintenance of highway signs.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown, but the measure requests that Caltrans determine the cost of appropriate signage consistent with requirements for the state highway system, and only erect the appropriate signage upon receiving donations from non-state sources covering the cost.

COMMENTS: Damon Christopher Gutzwiller was born at Santa Monica Hospital in Santa Monica, California, on June 29, 1981, to Vicki Gutzwiller. With his positivity, genuine smile, contagious laugh, and heart of gold, Damon always found the very best in every person he met.

Damon was a local child who attended schools in the County of Santa Cruz, graduating from Aptos High School in 1999 and earning an associate degree from Cabrillo College in Aptos. While attending Cabrillo College, Damon showed a special interest in serving his community and began working for the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office at Cabrillo College as a Campus Police Assistant and Office Specialist.

It was during these years that Damon was introduced to the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office Volunteer Program and became a valued member of the volunteer staff, becoming a volunteer member of the Santa Cruz County Search and Rescue team where he began serving as a member in 2005. In 2006 Damon was hired by the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office and attended the Gavilan College Police Academy, graduating with class SB 79.

During his career with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Damon worked as a patrol deputy, court security bailiff, field training officer, TASER instructor, SWAT operator, Unmanned Aerial Systems Operator, CSI detective, and Alcohol Compliance Officer, promoting to Sergeant in 2019, when he supervised a patrol shift. In his exceptionally accomplished 14-year career at the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Damon received ten commendations for extraordinary work.

Damon was a beloved member of the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office family, universally loved by the men and women he worked with and supervised. Damon was famous throughout the office for his ever-present smile, extraordinary patience, calm manner, and incredible sense of humor that left lasting impressions with those he met even after the briefest of encounters. While his personality made him a favorite among his coworkers, his deep knowledge, dedication

to community and service, bravery, fairness, and wit made him very successful in a difficult profession. Damon never buckled or surrendered to anything that would compromise his unshakeable honesty, loyalty, and integrity. Damon's career excellence will serve as an example for his brothers and sisters at the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office for years to come.

In 2012, Damon met the love of his life, Favi, who loved him for all the same reasons that his Sheriff's family loved him, including his humor, patience, loving nature, giant heart, and ever-present smile. Deeply in love, Damon and Favi shared so much together — a wonderful home in the Soquel hills, countless trips to Lake Tahoe, walks on the beach, and, in 2018, they welcomed a son, Carter, into their lives. Damon was an incredible father to Carter and no matter what he was doing, Damon would drop everything to play with his son. Damon loved singing, dancing, and reading books and relished every moment he could spend with Carter.

On the afternoon of June 6, 2020, in Ben Lomond, California, while Damon was supervising a suspicious-circumstance call related to potential bomb making material, he was ambushed and shot by a lone suspect and passed away on the scene. The suspect also shot another deputy, detonated a bomb, and struck the same deputy with a car, engaging in a gun battle with two Department of the California Highway Patrol officers before fleeing the scene. The suspect was apprehended shortly after Damon's passing. Weeks after Damon's death, Favi gave birth to their second child, a daughter, Lucia.

Damon is survived and forever remembered by his loving partner Favi, son Carter, daughter Lucia, mother Vicki, aunts Carole and Pat, and Favi's loving family Pascual, Micaela, Mickey, Junior, Marco, Salvador, and Miguel.

Damon is deeply missed by his family, friends, and the entire Santa Cruz Sheriff's Office family he is a hero for the man he was — husband, father, friend, and so much more to so many.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Aimee Anspach / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093