



## Supreme Court Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### *Supreme Court Affirms Convictions for Criminal Trespass, Disturbing the Peace, Theft, and Burglary*

On April 30, 2018, the Supreme Court issued its opinion in *Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands v. Ramon C. Blas*, 2018 MP 2. The court affirmed the trial court's judgment finding Ramon C. Blas ("Blas") guilty of criminal trespass, disturbing the peace, theft, and burglary.

On two occasions, Blas invaded the home of a married couple living in San Vicente. During his first trespass, the wife saw Blas on her balcony when she was home alone. On the second occasion, the couple saw him leaving their home as they came back from a shopping trip. Upon entering, they found the balcony door broken and over \$20,000 worth of jewelry and other valuables missing. During trial, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands ("Commonwealth") sought to introduce evidence of Blas' involvement in another burglary in the same area only a couple months earlier. The evidence was admitted over Blas' arguments that the notice of the other burglary was untimely and substantively deficient and that the evidence itself was inadmissible and unfairly prejudicial.

The Supreme Court reviewed Blas' convictions. It considered Blas' claims that evidence of his involvement in another burglary was wrongfully admitted as well as that parts of a detective's testimony violated his right to confront witnesses under the United States and NMI Constitutions. The Court found that because the evidence of Blas' involvement in another burglary was: 1) timely; 2) sufficiently specific; 3) indicative of Blas' identity as the burglar; and 4) not unfairly prejudicial, the trial court was reasonable in admitting it. Next, the Court considered whether Blas' right to confront witnesses against him was violated when a detective testified about other witnesses' statements. It agreed with both Blas and the Commonwealth that his right had indeed been violated. However, under the harmless error doctrine, the Court found that even without the detective's wrongfully admitted statements, multiple other damaging pieces of evidence against Blas supported his conviction beyond a reasonable doubt.

As a result, the Court affirmed Blas' convictions.

The Court's full opinion is available at <http://www.cnmilaw.org/supreme18.html>

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For further information, contact the Supreme Court at 236-9800.

**\*Disclaimer:** This press release constitutes no part of the opinion of the Court. It has been prepared by court staff for the convenience of the public.