

## PRESS RELEASE

# Mexican National Sentenced to 40 Months in Prison for Role in Smuggling and Labor Trafficking Scheme, Illegally Reentering U.S.

Monday, May 19, 2025

### For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Connecticut

David X. Sullivan, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, announced that APOLINAR FRANCISCO PAREDES ESPINOZA, also known as "Pancho," 58, a citizen of Mexico last residing in Hartford, was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Kari A. Dooley in Bridgeport to 40 months of imprisonment, for illegally reentering the U.S. and his involvement in a scheme to smuggle aliens into the U.S., harbor them at Hartford area residences, force them to work, and threaten to harm them in various ways if they failed to pay exorbitant fees, interest, and other living expenses.

According to court documents and statements made in court, beginning in September 2022, the FBI and Hartford Police interviewed several Mexican nationals who disclosed that they were smuggled from Mexico into the U.S. and transported to Hartford. The investigation revealed that victims typically arranged with Maria Del Carmen Sanchez Potrero and others in Connecticut and Mexico to cross the border into the U.S. in exchange for a fee of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 that each would need to pay once they were in the U.S. In most cases, the victims were required to turn over a property deed as collateral before leaving Mexico. They were then smuggled across the border and transported to Hartford area residences, including Sanchez's and Paredes' residence on Madison Street in Hartford, often at a substantial risk of bodily injury or death.

After the victims arrived in Connecticut, they were told that they would have to pay approximately \$30,000, with interest, and that they would have to pay Sanchez and her co-conspirators for rent, food, gas and utilities. Sanchez, Paredes, and their co-conspirators created false documents for the victims, including Permanent Residence cards and Social Security cards, and helped the victims find employment in the Hartford area. In addition to their own jobs, some victims were required to perform housework

and yardwork, or to assist Paredes in his job responsibilities, without compensation and without having their debt reduced.

Victims were rarely provided with an accounting of their debt. If victims failed to make regular payments, or in amounts that Sanchez, Paredes, and their co-conspirators expected, they were sometimes threatened, including with threats to harm family members in Mexico, to take property in Mexico that had been secured as collateral, to reveal victims' immigration status to U.S. authorities, and to raise their interest payments.

To date, investigators have identified 19 victims of this scheme. Multiple victims were minors, and at least two were smuggled into the U.S. unaccompanied by a relative or legal guardian.

In November 2014, Paredes was encountered in the U.S. and removed the same day via foot at Hildago, Texas. He illegally reentered the U.S. and, in December 2018, was arrested by East Hartford Police and charged with various motor vehicle offenses. He was again removed to Mexico in February 2019, and subsequently illegally reentered the U.S.

Paredes has been detained since his arrest on March 1, 2023. On November 22, 2024, he pleaded guilty to conspiracy to encourage and induce, bring in, transport, and harbor aliens, and to illegal reentry of a removed alien.

Sanchez and her daughter, Porfiria Maribel Ramos Sanchez, previously pleaded guilty to related charges. On April 11, 2025, Sanchez was sentenced to 51 months of imprisonment, and on March 7, 2025, Ramos was sentenced to 36 months of imprisonment.

Judge Dooley ordered Paredes to pay, jointly and severally with his codefendants, restitution of \$574,608.

Paredes, Sanchez, and Ramos face immigration proceedings when they complete their prison terms.

This investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Hartford Police Department, U.S. Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Angel Krull and Shan Patel.

*Updated May 19, 2025*

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