

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Mexican National Pleads Guilty to Charge Stemming from Smuggling and Labor Trafficking Scheme**

Friday, October 4, 2024

**For Immediate Release**

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

Vanessa Roberts Avery, United States Attorney for the District of Connecticut, announced that PORFIRIA MARIBEL RAMOS SANCHEZ, 47, a citizen of Mexico last residing in Vernon, pleaded guilty today before U.S. District Judge Kari A. Dooley in Bridgeport to a charge stemming from her 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 Ramos, her co-conspirators in Connecticut, and associates in 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, 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 \$30,000, with interest, and that they would have to pay Ramos and her co-conspirators for rent, food, gas and utilities. The 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 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 the 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 18 victims of this scheme.

Ramos pleaded guilty to conspiracy to encourage and induce, bring in, transport, and harbor aliens, an offense that carries a maximum term of imprisonment of 10 years. Judge Dooley scheduled sentencing for January 6, 2025.

As part of her plea agreement, Ramos has agreed to a restitution order of \$494,608. In partial satisfaction of her restitution obligation, Ramos and her husband have agreed to sell a property they own at 74 Burnside Avenue in East Hartford, which was used to facilitate this criminal offense.

Ramos has been detained since her arrest on October 5, 2023.

U.S. Attorney Avery stressed that a criminal complaint is not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

This investigation is being 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 is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Angel Krull and Shan Patel.

*Updated October 4, 2024*

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