

PRESS RELEASE

Honduran Man Pleads Guilty To Aggravated Identity Theft And Related Fraud Charges

Thursday, May 15, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Tampa, Florida – United States Attorney Gregory W. Kehoe announces that Elieser Aurelio Gomez-Zelaya (34, Honduras) has pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft, false representation of a Social Security number, and false claim of United States citizenship for employment purposes. Gomez-Zelaya faces a minimum term of two years, up to 12 years, in federal prison. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

According to court documents, Archer Western-de Moya Group Joint Venture II (Joint Venture) is enrolled in E-Verify, a web-based system through which employers electronically confirm the employment eligibility of their employees. E-Verify is administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The SSA and USCIS verify the submitted information against the records of actual persons who are authorized to work in the United States. E-Verify is a voluntary program for employers and requires documents such as a Social Security number and photo identification of a prospective employee.

From at least 2021 through September 2022, Gomez-Zelaya used another person's means of identification to defeat the E-Verify system and to commit the felony offenses of misuse of a Social Security Number and false claim of United States citizenship for employment purposes. Gomez-Zelaya was encountered by law enforcement at the Joint Venture on September 22, 2022. He was working there under the stolen identity. That night, another individual at the Joint Venture, also working under a stolen identity, Juan Molina-Salles, struck and killed Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy Michael Hartwick at the Joint Venture's construction site in Pinellas County. During the investigation into Deputy Hartwick's death, Gomez-Zelaya gave a false name (the stolen identity) to law enforcement and was arrested on state charges of accessory after the fact.

This case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations, the Department of Transportation – Office of Inspector General, the Social Security Administration – Office of the Inspector General, the United States Border Patrol, the Department of Labor – Office of Inspector General, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Christopher F. Murray.

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