

**PRESS RELEASE**

# **Honduran National Pleads Guilty To Aggravated Identity Theft And Related Fraud Charges**

Monday, September 15, 2025

**For Immediate Release**

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

Tampa, Florida – United States Attorney Gregory W. Kehoe announces that Juan Ariel Molina-Salles (35, Honduras) today pleaded guilty to aggravated identity theft, false representation of a Social Security number, and false claim of United States citizenship for employment purposes. Molina-Salles faces a minimum penalty of 2 years in federal prison, consecutive to any other prison term, and a maximum term of 12 years' imprisonment.

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. Molina-Salles is an illegal alien from Honduras with no lawful status in the United States. On February 16, 2022, Molina-Salles applied for employment with the Joint Venture in Pinellas County and filled out an I-9 form for use in the E-Verify system. On that form, Molina-Salles falsely identified himself as a United States citizen. He used another person's means of identification (V.V.R.) to defeat the E-Verify system.

Molina-Salles provided no documents or other proof that he was trained or qualified to operate a front-end loader or other heavy construction equipment. On the evening of September 22, 2022, Molina-Salles was working at the Joint Venture's highway construction site in Pinellas County under the stolen identity V.V.R. That night, while operating a front-end loader, Molina-Salles struck and killed Deputy Michael Hartwick of the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO).

On September 23, 2022, Molina-Salles was arrested in connection with Deputy Hartwick's death and interviewed by PCSO detectives. Molina-Salles explained to investigators that he was from Honduras and had been in the United States for approximately eight months and confirmed his identity was not V.V.R, but rather Juan

Ariel Molina-Salles. Molinas-Salles stated he had come to the United States illegally and was undocumented, having come through Mexico to the United States by entering in Texas. He admitted to using the stolen identity to gain employment with Archer Western.

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.

*Updated September 15, 2025*

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