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October 8, 2020

AURORA RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH CHILD LABOR TRAFFICKING

CHICAGO — A couple from Aurora has been charged in federal court with child labor trafficking for allegedly forcing an undocumented Guatemalan teenager to work and keeping her earnings.

SANTOS TEODORO AC-SALAZAR, 23, and OLGA CHOC LAJ, 30, are charged with forcing labor through force, threats of force, and the threatened abuse of the law and legal process. The pair is in law enforcement custody and have made initial appearances in federal court in Chicago. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Oct. 15, 2020, at 9:00 a.m., before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jeffrey Cole.

The charges were announced by John R. Lausch, Jr., United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; James M. Gibbons, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago office of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations; and Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General in Chicago. Substantial assistance in the investigation was provided by the Aurora Police Department and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Prashant Kolluri.

According to the charges, Choc Laj accompanied the teenage victim into the United States from Guatemala and gave false identifications to U.S. immigration authorities. Once in the U.S., Choc Laj harbored the victim in a residence in Aurora and forced the victim to provide labor and services for Choc Laj's financial gain, the complaint states. AC-Salazar later joined Choc Laj in the Aurora residence and participated in the labor trafficking by, among other things, forcing the victim to perform household chores, including taking care of the defendants' infant child, the complaint states.

The public is reminded that a complaint is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a

reasonable doubt. The charge in the complaint is punishable by up to 20 years in federal prison. If convicted, the Court must impose a reasonable sentence under federal statutes and the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines.

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