

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT *of* TEXAS

[U.S. Attorneys](#) » [Southern District of Texas](#) » [News](#)

Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Texas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, December 6, 2022

Criminal charges unsealed against 12 individuals in wide-ranging scheme to monopolize transmigrante industry and extort competitors near U.S.-Mexico border

Charges include use of violence, threats and extortion to fix prices, allocate the market and eliminate competition

HOUSTON – The Department of Justice has announced the unsealing of an 11-count indictment charging 12 individuals in a long-running, multi-faceted conspiracy to monopolize the transmigrante forwarding industry in the Los Indios border region near Harlingen and Brownsville.

Transmigrantes are individuals who transport used vehicles and other goods from the United States through Mexico for resale in Central America. Transmigrante forwarding agencies are businesses that provide services to transmigrante clients, including helping those clients complete the customs paperwork required to export vehicles into Mexico.

According to the indictment, Carlos Favian Martinez, 36, Mission; Marco Antonio Medina, 32, Rigoberto Brown, 38, and Miguel Hipolito Caballero Apart, 70, all of Brownsville; Pedro Antonio Calvillo Hernandez, 47, Tamaulipas, Mexico; Roberto Garcia Villareal, 56, San Benito; Sandra Guerra Medina, 68, Rancho Viejo; and Mireya Miranda, 56, La Feria, conspired to fix prices and allocate the market for transmigrante services in violation of Section 1 of the Sherman Act. They also allegedly conspired to monopolize the same market in violation of Section 2 of the Sherman Act. The indictment alleges they implemented price-fixing agreements and created a centralized entity known as “The Pool” to collect and divide revenues among the conspirators.

Transmigrante agency owners and industry participants who refused to charge the fixed prices, pay into the pool or pay an extortion tax were subjected to threats, intimidation and acts of violence against themselves and their families, employees, associates and businesses, according to the charges.

Martinez, Medina, Calvillo and Garcia, along with Diego Ceballos-Soto, 48, Matamoros, Mexico, and Carlos Yzaguirre, 63, Mission, were also charged with one count of conspiracy to interfere with commerce by extortion. The indictment alleges several violent acts perpetrated against transmigrante industry participants and individuals closely associated with them who disrupted the scheme or refused to pay the extortion fees. Martinez, Ceballos-Soto and Yzaguirre were also charged with one count of interference in commerce by

extortion. They allegedly forced one transmigrante agency owner to pay more than \$80,000 for operating outside of the Pool and failing to pay the extortion tax.

Finally, Martinez, Medina, Calvillo, Ceballos-Soto and Yzaguirre, along with Juan Hector Ramirez Avila, 32, and Jose de Jesus Tapia Fernandez, 44, both of Brownsville, were charged with money laundering conspiracy and substantive counts of money laundering related to the underlying scheme.

“The indictment charges that defendants monopolized an industry through horrific violence and threats of violence,” said Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter of the Justice Department’s Antitrust Division. “The department will use all the tools at its disposal – including Section 2 of the Sherman Act – to target anticompetitive conduct that undermines our country’s economic vitality and freedom.”

“As alleged, this criminal organization committed heinous acts of violence against those who would not participate in its illegal activities,” said Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite Jr. of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “Together with our partners, we are committed to dismantling violent enterprises that victimize individuals simply trying to earn an honest living.”

“The charges announced today demonstrate our office’s commitment to protecting Texans from violent crime and exploitive business practices,” said U.S. Attorney Jennifer Lowery. “Working with our partners across the government, we will continue to investigate and prosecute violent criminals who prey on our communities.”

“This case is further proof that organized crime is active and negatively impacting our communities,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Craig Larrabee of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) San Antonio. “These violent criminal organizations monopolized the transmigrante industry by using acts of violence, threats and even extortion. HSI employs a full range of law enforcement techniques and cross-border authorities to combat this egregious criminal activity. HSI and its law enforcement partners are committed to dismantling organized crime by eliminating their corrupt influence in our communities and protecting our nation’s borders.”

“Today’s actions are the result of the FBI’s continued collaborative efforts with our law enforcement partners in this important investigation,” said Special Agent in Charge Oliver E. Rich Jr. of the FBI San Antonio Division. “The FBI remains dedicated to protecting American communities from threats of violence and economic crime.”

HSI and the FBI are investigating the case.

***An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence.
A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.***

Component(s):
USAO - Texas, Southern

Updated December 6, 2022