



News Releases

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SAVANNAH, GA

2 arrested in Georgia worksite enforcement operation

SAVANNAH, Ga. — A Georgia couple accused of harboring illegal aliens for commercial advantage and then laundering the proceeds was arrested Friday following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Criminal Investigations Division and the Columbia County Sheriff's Office.

Hugo Diaz, 43, and Blanca Diaz, 42, of Evans, Ga., appeared in federal court Monday after being indicted last week by a federal grand jury. The indictment also charges four of the illegal aliens with unlawful entry into the United States.

U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia Edward J. Tarver said, "The federal government's immigration enforcement responsibilities are an important priority for the Department of Justice. The U.S. Attorney's Office is committed to enforcing all federal criminal laws and criminal immigration laws are no exception. This investigation clearly shows the ability of federal and local law enforcement agencies to work together to achieve justice and to thwart those whose goal is to profit from criminal activity."

Brock D. Nicholson, special agent in charge of HSI for Georgia and the Carolinas, said that one of his agency's "top priorities in worksite enforcement investigations is to hold employers accountable for exploiting illegal alien labor. Companies that break our employment laws for financial gain drive illegal immigration into the United States and deprive our nation's lawful workforce of employment opportunities."

The indictment charges Hugo and Blanca Diaz with four counts of harboring illegal aliens and one count of money laundering conspiracy. Hugo is also charged with 10 counts of money laundering. Each of these crimes carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. The indictment also seeks the forfeiture of proceeds from Diaz's crimes, including multiple parcels of real estate in Georgia and South Carolina, as well as 10 vehicles.

Brian D. Lamkin, special agent in charge of the FBI's Atlanta field office, said, "Individuals that profit from the blatant disregard for U.S. law, as is alleged in this matter, rightfully become the focus of federal law enforcement and its many and varied resources. The FBI will continue to work with its law enforcement partners to ensure that such individuals are brought to justice and their criminal endeavors disrupted."

Rodney E. Clark, special agent in charge of IRS-Criminal Investigations said, "Seizing and forfeiting assets from those who seek to profit from illegal activity is a priority of federal criminal prosecutions. Those who deliberately harbor undocumented workers for financial gain will be held accountable for their actions. We at the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division, remain steadfast in our commitment along with our federal, state and local law enforcement partners to financially disrupt individuals and organizations that are determined to benefit from the fruits of their illegal activity."

Columbia County Sheriff Clay Whittle said, "This investigation was a collaborative effort involving various law enforcement agencies. As Sheriff of Columbia County, I will continue to investigate employers who build their business model on exploiting a cheap source of labor while depressing wages for law abiding citizens. Our goal is to reduce the demand for illegal employment and protect employment opportunities for our lawful workforce. In pursuit of this goal we will continue to hold accountable those employers who deliberately hire and exploit illegal aliens."

Tarver emphasized that an indictment is only an accusation and is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Assistant U.S. Attorney David M. Stewart is prosecuting the case.