



U.S. Department of Justice

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**HOWARD INDUSTRIES HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER CHARGED
IN NEW INDICTMENT WITH CONSPIRACY, AGGRAVATED
IDENTITY THEFT, AND EMPLOYEE VERIFICATION FRAUD**

STAN HARRIS, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Mississippi, and Special Agent in Charge MICHAEL A. HOLT, Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, announced that a grand jury sitting in Jackson, Mississippi has voted a superseding indictment of **JOSE HUMBERTO GONZÁLEZ**, Human Resources Manager for Howard Industries, Inc., whose transformer manufacturing plant was the subject of an immigration sweep last August in Laurel, Mississippi. **GONZÁLEZ** was charged in a 12-count superseding indictment with conspiracy, aggravated identity theft, and employee verification fraud in connection with the employment of illegal aliens at the company's transformer manufacturing facility in Laurel. **GONZÁLEZ** is currently on bail awaiting trial before the Honorable Keith Starrett, United States District Judge, in Hattiesburg.

"The new indictment concentrates more of the focus on the conspiratorial conduct, which is at the heart of the case, as well as the new allegation involving **GONZÁLEZ**'s participation in knowingly using the results of identity theft in employing job applicants at Howard Industries, which amounts to aggravated identity theft," said U.S. Attorney HARRIS. "The indictment also narrows the employee verification fraud counts to produce a more streamlined set of charges."

"ICE aggressively targets employers who egregiously violate immigration laws by knowingly employing an illegal alien workforce," said MICHAEL A. HOLT, Special Agent-in-Charge of ICE's Office of Investigations in New Orleans. "This indictment demonstrates firsthand how ICE agents use our investigative tools to pursue those who take advantage of illegal labor for personal profit."

In the superseding indictment returned today, **GONZÁLEZ** was charged with conspiring to commit multiple offenses against the United States, including encouraging illegal aliens to reside in the United States, attempting to conceal and harbor illegal aliens, falsely attesting to the validity of employment-related documents, and aggravated identity theft. The indictment alleges that it was a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ**, on behalf of Howard Industries, would routinely hire illegal aliens and in the process of such hiring would accept false

identity documents, including alien registration receipt cards and Social Security cards. The indictment further states that, as part of the conspiracy, defendant **GONZÁLEZ** would submit Social Security numbers provided to him by applicants at the Laurel plant to the Social Security Administration to verify their numbers and, after being notified by the Social Security Administration that the Social Security numbers of such applicants were not found to be valid, **GONZÁLEZ** would nonetheless hire and continue to employ such persons. As charged, it was also a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ** would instruct employees to obtain alternative identity documents which he knew falsely represented their true identities. The indictment further charges that it was also a part of the conspiracy that **GONZÁLEZ** would assure Spanish-speaking foreign nationals working at the Laurel plant that they would be warned if immigration authorities were coming to the plant.

In addition to the conspiracy charge, **GONZÁLEZ** was charged with aiding and abetting aggravated identity theft in connection with hiring an employee who had previously worked at Howard Industries, Inc. under a different identity. The superseding indictment also charges **GONZÁLEZ** with 10 counts of falsely certifying to the employment eligibility of job applicants and employees. The indictment charges that, on

various dates, **GONZÁLEZ** falsely certified, under penalty of perjury, on Form I-9 Employment Eligibility Verifications that he had examined the documents listed on the Form I-9 and determined them to be genuine and that, to the best of his knowledge, the applicant was eligible to work in the United States, whereas in fact he had been notified by the Social Security Administration that the Social Security numbers of such applicants were not found to be valid, or was otherwise aware that the Social Security number did not belong to the employee.

Defendant **GONZÁLEZ** faces a maximum of five years of imprisonment on the conspiracy charge and on each employee verification fraud count. **GONZÁLEZ** also faces a minimum of two years of imprisonment for the aggravated identity theft charge. In addition to possible imprisonment, the defendant faces a maximum fine of \$250,000, and three years of supervised release for each count.

Along with United States Attorney STAN HARRIS, Assistant United States Attorney GAINES CLEVELAND and MIKE HURST are the prosecutors in charge of the case.

Mr. HARRIS praised the efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for its diligent work in the investigation of this matter.

United States Attorney HARRIS stressed that this indictment represents an accusation only and the defendant is entitled to a presumption of innocence.

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