



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

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News Release

Timothy Jeffries, Director

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Media Contact

Office of Communications

602-542-4296

PIO@azdes.gov

Undercover Operation Leads to Food Stamp Fraud Bust in Excess of \$600k

Owner of Dulceria Mayra's Y Mas Convenience Store Arrested

PHOENIX – As the result of an undercover fraud operation, the DES Office of Inspector General (OIG), in conjunction with other local, state and federal law enforcement entities, served search warrants at two Phoenix locations. One of those warrants resulted in the arrest of Ms. Mayra Ramirez, owner of Dulceria Mayra's Y Mas retail store, for suspected Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) fraud in the amount of \$607,674.

"Adhering to the rule of law by aggressively pursuing those who seek to defraud programs designated for those in need is one of the most admirable acts a government can pursue to show its commitment to the protection of taxpayer funds," said Director Timothy Jeffries. "We will continue to bring to justice all who commit fraud and steal from those in need. I commend the DES Office of Inspector General for its vigorous pursuit of the individual involved in this massive food stamp fraud operation."

"The DES Office of Inspector General will continue to work to protect the integrity of DES programs and services," said Inspector General Juan J. Arcellana. "I am extremely gratified that this multi-year investigation has successfully shut down an illegal operation that was stealing public funds intended for individuals in need of food. DES-OIG appreciates the support of its partners involved in this operation who are critical to safeguarding benefits for those in need."

On September 20, investigators with the DES OIG, Arizona Attorney General's Office, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Phoenix Police Department served search warrants at two locations in Phoenix, including a retail location and private residence. Ms. Mayra Ramirez is suspected of using her retail store, Dulceria Mayra's Y Mas, to allow customers to exchange SNAP benefits for cash, and to purchase ineligible items with their Electronic Benefits Transaction Card (EBT), totaling a SNAP loss of approximately \$607,674.

Ms. Mayra Ramirez was booked into the Maricopa County 4th Avenue jail on September 20 on multiple counts of Fraud Schemes, Unlawful Use of Food Stamps, Money Laundering, Theft, Computer Tampering, Illegal Control of an Enterprise, Solicitation of a Crime, Conspiracy, and Facilitation.

"The USDA OIG has the responsibility for protecting the integrity of the SNAP," said Special Agent-in-Charge Lori Chan, USDA, Office of Inspector General. "Vendors who engage in SNAP fraud exploit the program's needy beneficiaries, and misuse the substantial funding that taxpayers provide. USDA OIG works to ensure SNAP funds are used for their intended purpose, feeding families, not for the enrichment of criminal enterprises. We would like to thank the Arizona Attorney General's Office, Phoenix Police Department, and the Department of Economic Security Office of Inspector General for their joint efforts and assistance in this investigation and look forward to their continued support in combatting SNAP fraud."

All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

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The Arizona Department of Economic Security makes Arizona stronger by helping Arizonans reach their potential through temporary assistance for those in need, and care for the vulnerable.

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