

NEWS

GOVERNMENT'S CASE AGAINST ABREGO GARCIA IS BASED ON PG COUNTY COP WHO WAS ON THE SA'S DO NOT CALL LIST

BASED ON HIS ILLEGAL USE OF INFORMATION, IVAN MENDEZ WAS ONLY AN ACTIVE DUTY OFFICER FOR FIVE DAYS AFTER ALLEGING WITHOUT EVIDENCE THAT ABREGO GARCIA WAS A GANG MEMBER.

BY BAYNARD WOODS
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Credit: Jaisal Noor

The Maryland cop who first linked Kilmar Abrego Garcia to alleged gang activity in 2019 was placed on a “do not call” list published by Prince George’s County State’s Attorney Aisha Braveboy in 2021 —

meaning he was deemed unfit to testify in state court due to criminal charges filed against him for sharing confidential information about a police investigation.

This means that the Trump administration has detained Abrego Garcia in the CECOT prison in El Salvador, against the rulings of the Supreme Court and a Maryland District Court, based solely on the word of a cop deemed untrustworthy by the county's state's attorney's office.

The New Republic **first reported** that PGPD Corporal Ivan Mendez, who filled out Abrego Garcia's "gang field interview sheet," pleaded guilty to criminal misconduct in office charges based on giving information about a police investigation to a sex worker in December 2018, according to Maryland Case Search — just months before Abrego Garcia's arrest in a Home Depot parking lot.

Attorney General Pam Bondi **released** on Wednesday a redacted form of the "Gang Field Interview Sheet" filled out by Mendez when PGPD arrested Abrego Garcia in 2019, with right-wing media outlets crowing that they "reveal" his MS-13 gang "rank" and "street name."

Abrego Garcia has been illegally abducted by the Trump administration and imprisoned in El Salvador on the basis of the allegation of gang membership, which, the administration claims, annuls the 2019 "withholding order" that made it illegal to deport him to El Salvador.

Baltimore Beat reporting shows Mendez was one of 57 officers on a "**do not call**" list published by Prince George's County State's Attorney Braveboy in 2021.

At the time the list was released, Braveboy **said** that untrustworthy officers risk "the integrity of cases brought to the justice system." And yet, the United States Department of Justice is basing the extraordinary rendition of a Maryland resident solely on the credibility of just such an officer.

According to Maryland Case Search, Mendez's crime occurred on December 31, 2018, when, according to the **Prince George's County Police Department**, he provided "confidential information to a commercial sex worker who he was paying in exchange for sexual acts. The information he provided focused on an on-going police investigation."

On March 28, 2019, Abrego Garcia went to the Home Depot in Hyattsville, looking for work as a day laborer. While waiting around for a job, Abrego Garcia and three other men were stopped by police, according to court documents. "At the police station, the four young men were placed into different rooms and questioned. Plaintiff Abrego Garcia was asked if he was a gang member; when he told police he was not, they said that they did not believe him and repeatedly demanded that he provide information about other gang members.

The police told Plaintiff Abrego Garcia that he would be released if he cooperated, but he repeatedly explained that he did not have any information to give because he did not know anything,” a 2019 court filing reads.

Mendez filled out the “Gang Field Interview Sheet” that deemed Abrego Garcia a member of MS-13, based on the fact that he was wearing a Chicago Bulls hat and hoodie “indicative of the Hispanic gang culture” and a confidential informant who told them that Abrego Garcia was “an active member of MS-13 with the Westerns clique,” even though the Western clique is located in Long Island — a place Abrego Garcia had never been. “Officers know MS-13 gang members are only allowed to hang around other members or prospects for the gang,” Mendez wrote.

Then, only three days later, on April 1, “PGPD was first made aware of the allegations against Mendez,” the department’s statement reads. “He was suspended on April 3, 2019.”

“The officer’s police powers were then suspended and he remains suspended. We then brought our investigation to the State’s Attorney Office for consideration of charges,” said then-Interim Police Chief Hector Velez. “All allegations of criminal misconduct by our officers are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.”

Mendez was investigated thoroughly enough that he pleaded guilty to misconduct in office in state court in 2022, being sentenced to probation before judgment.

So, because of his illegal use of information, Mendez was only an active-duty officer for five days after alleging that Abrego Garcia was a gang member. Meanwhile, Abrego Garcia remained locked up for months in the Howard County Detention Center, where he married his pregnant wife Jennifer Vasquez Sura in a ceremony that was **“far from how we ever imagined it.”**

In October 2019, after months of incarceration based solely on the word of Mendez, who had already been charged with misconduct in office, a judge granted Abrego Garcia “withholding of removal” status, which made it illegal for him to be deported to El Salvador because of “past persecution based on protected ground, and the presumption of a well-founded fear of future persecution,” which means that the government could not deport him to El Salvador because to do so would cause irreparable harm based upon past threats.

Then, more than five years later, after Mendez pleaded guilty to misconduct in office, the entire executive branch holds Mendez’s Gang Field Interview Sheet, filled out in the period between Mendez committing a crime and his imminent exposure, above the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court, which, in a 9-0 decision, ordered the Trump administration to facilitate the return of Abrego Garcia.

After the power trip press conference held by President Trump and El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele, in which they made a verbal game of Abrego Garcia's rendition and detention, Maryland Senator (D) Chris Van Hollen travelled to El Salvador on Wednesday where he met with Vice President Félix Ulloa, but was denied a visit or even a phone call with Abrego Garcia, to at the very least confirm that he was healthy and, in the worst case scenario, still alive.

Abrego Garcia's wife Vasquez Sura has not heard from him since March 15, the day before he was sent to CECOT, when he called her from an ICE detention center in Louisiana.

"That call was short and Kilmar's tone was different. He was scared. He was told he was being deported to El Salvador...to a super-max prison called 'CECOT,'" Vasquez Sura wrote in a court filing. "After that, I never heard from Kilmar again."

She only knows he's at CECOT because she was able to pick him out of one of the published photographs of stripped and shaved inmates who had been deported to the prison without due process. Neither she nor his lawyers have had any news or contact with him since then.

"President Trump and our Attorney General Pam Bondi and the Vice President of the United States are lying when they say Abrego Garcia has been charged with a crime or is a member of MS-13," Van Hollen said in a statement. "This is a lie to cover up what they did...they illegally abducted Mr. Abrego Garcia from Maryland."

Van Hollen is the first lawmaker to take real action attempting to effectuate Abrego Garcia's return. Senator Angela Alsobrooks, who was the County Executive for Prince George's County when Mendez first arrested Abrego Garcia, has not responded to the Beat's questions about the role of the disgraced PGPD corporal in Abrego Garcia's illegal, out-of-country detention.