



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 21, 2025

Judge Quits After ICE Bags Illegal Venezuelan Suspected of TdA Membership Living in Judge's Home

The latest embarrassment for the Democratic Party — or what should be an embarrassment — comes out of [Doña Ana County](#), New Mexico.

A Democratic magistrate judge resigned his post in early March after he was caught harboring an illegal alien. And that illegal alien, federal authorities believe, just happens to be a member of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua (TdA) terror gang.

But maybe Joel Cano was just living up to the [Democrats' unofficial motto](#) — illegal aliens “are the people we care about most” — when he provided lodging for Venezuelan goon Cristhian Ortega-Lopez.



End Wokeness/X
Judge Joel Cano

Ortega-Lopez was yet another Biden “migrant” caught jumping the border then released [to commit crimes](#).

Venezuelan Illegal With Alleged Tren de Aragua Ties Arrested for Possession of Firearm While Reportedly Living at Home of New Mexico Judge

Judge Jose "Joel" Cano abruptly resigned days after ICE HSI raid at his house in Las Cruces

Full story coming... pic.twitter.com/UvkrAC2PDT

— Border Hawk (@BorderHawkNews) [April 18, 2025](#)

ICE Search

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has been searching for Ortega-Lopez since at least March, when it reported that he was charged with unlawfully possessing firearms.

ICE began an investigation in January it reported, after receiving an anonymous tip.

The TdA suspect “was allegedly residing with other illegal aliens” in Las Cruces and possessed firearms, [ICE reported](#):

Ortega-Lopez had entered the United States illegally on Dec. 15, 2023, and was released pending removal proceedings. Social media evidence showed Ortega-Lopez in possession of multiple firearms at a shooting range in Las Cruces.

Ortega-Lopez is charged ... with being an illegal alien in possession of a firearm or ammunition.



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On February 28, the [Albuquerque Journal reported](#), ICE agents searched the home owned by Judge Cano and his wife, Nancy.

“Court filings state that agents recovered four firearms from a neighboring home owned by April Cano, who is identified in court filings as Nancy Cano’s daughter,” the newspaper reported:

A criminal complaint alleges Ortega-Lopez admitted to possessing and firing them, as seen in photos and videos posted on Facebook last December.

Ortega-Lopez was taken into custody along with other individuals described as roommates in court filings. On March 3, he appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Damian Martinez on charges of being an unlawful alien in possession of a firearm and ammunition. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. ...

Previously, Ortega-Lopez was accused of entering the United States by scaling a barbed-wire fence near Eagle Pass, Texas. After three days in Border Patrol custody, he was released on humanitarian parole ahead of deportation proceedings due to overcrowded facilities at the Border Patrol’s South Laredo, Texas, processing center, court records state.

After Joe Biden’s border team loosed Ortega-Lopez upon an unsuspecting public, the illegal landed in El Paso, prosecutors allege. There “he roomed with five other people,” the [Journal reported](#). That’s where he met Nancy Cano “doing construction and handyman jobs, and accepted her offer to stay in a casita behind her home,” the [newspaper continued](#):

In April 2024, Ortega-Lopez filed a request for immigration relief, listing the Las Cruces address as his residence.

Prosecutors say Ortega-Lopez was subsequently introduced to April Cano, “who possessed a large number of firearms” and “allowed him to hold and sometimes shoot various firearms,” allegedly including rifles and a handgun tied to the social media posts.

Exhibits presented in federal court include a social media image showing Ortega-Lopez posing with the judge.

ICE arrested Cristhian Ortega-Lopez, an alleged TdA affiliate, following an anonymous tip. Thank you, anonymous tipster — we appreciate you!

He’s been charged with possession of a firearm or ammunition. He’s safely in custody.

□ Learn more: <https://t.co/V73JPFTBS8> pic.twitter.com/aJ52UKtvnH

— U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (@ICEgov) [March 15, 2025](#)

Almost Released, Judge Resigns

But that mightn’t be the worst of the story. The federal magistrate judge, Martinez, wanted to free Ortega-Lopez into the custody of Nancy Cano.

“I don’t think he would just let anybody live in his property,” Martinez inexplicably said of legal



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colleague Cano. That head scratcher shows up in the federal prosecutors' appeal to keep Ortega-Lopez locked up. "The appeal also states that Martinez requested that pretrial services staff assess whether Nancy Cano could be the defendant's third-party custodian, despite the arrest having taken place at her residence," the [Journal reported](#).

Yet only last week did taxpayers learn the reason Cano quit his post, the newspaper continued.

Cano didn't offer a reason in his letter, dated March 3. But he quit the cushy job after the feds found Ortega-Lopez — suspected of membership in TdA — living with the judge.

Cano's last day was March 21. He began service after he was elected in 2010.

Harboring Charges

Remaining to be seen is whether federal authorities charge Cano and/or his family with [harboring an illegal alien](#), as border czar Tom Homan has repeatedly [vowed to do](#).

Prosecutors might want to investigate whether the Canos openly violated three of the [statute's main points](#). The statute says it is a crime if someone:

- knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that an alien has come to, entered, or remains in the United States in violation of law, transports, or moves or attempts to transport or move such alien ... ;
- knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that an alien has come to, entered, or remains in the United States in violation of law, conceals, harbors, or shields from detection, or attempts to conceal, harbor, or shield from detection, such alien in any place ... ;
- encourages or induces an alien to come to, enter, or reside in the United States, knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, or residence is or will be in violation of law.

The harboring isn't a serious matter only because the judge appears to have violated black-letter immigration law.

For the still-detained Ortega-Lopez, authorities suspect, is a TdA member. The Trump administration is attempting to deport those "migrants" under the Alien Enemies Act (AEA).

In invoking the act [after declaring](#) TdA a terrorist organization (along with other gangs), Trump explained that TdA is linked to the regime of Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro. The AEA [executive order says](#):

TdA operates in conjunction with Cártel de los Soles, the Nicolas Maduro regime-sponsored, narco-terrorism enterprise based in Venezuela, and commits brutal crimes, including murders, kidnappings, extortions, and human, drug, and weapons trafficking.

TdA has engaged in and continues to engage in mass illegal migration to the United States to further its objectives of harming United States citizens, undermining public safety, and supporting the Maduro regime's goal of destabilizing democratic nations in the Americas, including the United States.

TdA is closely aligned with, and indeed has infiltrated, the Maduro regime, including its



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military and law enforcement apparatus. TdA grew significantly while Tareck El Aissami served as governor of Aragua between 2012 and 2017. In 2017, El Aissami was appointed as Vice President of Venezuela.



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