



**Date of occurrence:** September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

**Employee Name:** Detective Andres Mendoza

**Unit/Division:** Criminal Investigations Unit

**Award/Commendation type and recommendations:** Commendation and Officer of the Month

**Narrative:**

The Champlain Towers South building collapse catastrophe on June 24, 2021, impacted many families, the entire Town of Surfside, surrounding communities and Miami-Dade County, in unimaginable ways. The employees were called upon to serve their community in an unthinkable situation and redefined to protect and serve. The Surfside building collapse immediately became the top story on every news channel and our town received national and international coverage. On July 9, 2021, the first report of Fraud was received involving one of the victims deceased in the tragedy. Subject(s) were able to access the victim's account transferring \$2,000.00 dollars. Family members of five additional victims came forward to report fraud in their deceased family members accounts, raising the total to six victims. The subject(s) changed the victims addresses, purchased gift cards, and made high end purchases by stealing their identities. Detective Mendoza was assigned the investigation and discovered that the Aventura Police Department had also received a fraud report of a seventh victim associated with the building collapse. Detective Mendoza, Aventura Police detectives, and the State Attorney's Office collaborated in the investigation. Detective Mendoza worked tirelessly running a thorough and meticulous investigation. As a result, Detective Mendoza successfully identified the first subject through store cameras and a witness. This was no easy task, considering the subject attempted to conceal her identity in several ways. A surveillance operation was conducted for several days. The surveillance mission yielded positive results and the necessary evidence to proceed with arrest warrants. The State Attorney's Office granted three arrest warrants and three search warrants for the subjects' vehicles and three residential locations. After a considerable amount of planning and coordination, on September 8, 2021, various local and federal partners gathered to execute the warrants. A total of four subjects were arrested, each receiving a high bond amount. Three vehicles were seized and impounded, and three residences were searched. Detectives located a plethora of personal mail with names of the victims, credit card making machines, blank credit cards and checks, narcotics, and a firearm.

Detective Andres Mendoza conducted an exceptional investigation, which lead to the apprehension of the subjects who used a tragic situation to further victimize devastated families. Detective Mendoza is a dedicated professional and commended for his tenacity in conducting a comprehensive investigation that honored the victims who were brazenly victimized by callous criminals. Congratulations to Detective Andres Mendoza as the recipient of the September Officer of the Month award...well deserved!