



# Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

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<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/flm/pr>

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## **JURY FINDS NEW YORK MAN GUILTY OF SEX TRAFFICKING WOMEN BY FORCE, THREATS OF FORCE, AND FRAUD**

Jacksonville, Florida - U.S. Attorney Robert E. O'Neill announces that a federal jury on February 16, 2011, found Tyrone Townsend (age 45, of New York City) guilty of sex trafficking by force, threats of force and fraud; transporting women across state lines for prostitution; enticing, inducing and coercing a woman to travel across state lines for prostitution; and conspiracy to transport a woman across state lines for prostitution. Townsend faces minimum mandatory sentences of 30 years and a maximum penalty of two consecutive life sentences plus 35 years in federal prison for his crimes. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for June 6, 2011. Townsend was indicted on April 20, 2010.

According to testimony and evidence presented at trial, Townsend met the first victim, an eighteen-year-old runaway, in April 2009 after she traveled by Greyhound bus to New York City. He met the second victim, a Canadian citizen, after she responded to an internet advertisement and met up with Townsend and the first victim in Norfolk, Virginia. Both victims testified that Townsend beat them (including beating one victim with a belt) and sexually assaulted them as a means of causing them to engage in commercial sex acts. Both victims testified that Townsend required them to call him "Daddy," and that

Townsend also went by the name "King Tycoon." The Canadian victim testified that Townsend forcibly removed her personal property (including her passport, cell phone, and laptop computer) from her belongings at the residence of Townsend's brother in Thomasville, North Carolina as a means of preventing her from leaving. Investigators actually recovered the woman's hidden passport from inside a stereo speaker at the brother's residence. Evidence also included a Myspace message to one of the victims in which Townsend acknowledged that the victim would be beaten for not making "her number," a reference to a nightly quota of \$1,000.00. Townsend transported the women from Norfolk, Virginia, to Thomasville, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, Kingsland, Georgia, and Jacksonville, Florida. Townsend and the women were in Jacksonville from September 9, 2009, until September 16, 2009. Townsend caused the women to engage in commercial sex acts from an abandoned apartment on Edenfield Road and also from the locations of customers, including local homes and hotels. On September 16, 2009, the Canadian woman was apprehended by the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office as part of an undercover prostitution sting. At that time, the woman became hysterical and advised officers about what had happened to her. The investigation into Townsend's sex trafficking activities then commenced. Investigators amassed a large amount of evidence including hotel records, phone records, bank records, and 28 internet ads in which Townsend advertised the victim's availability for commercial sex acts. Investigators also seized a Garmin GPS from Townsend's vehicle and were able to establish locations of various customers in Jacksonville from the data contained in the Garmin.

In commenting on the prosecution:

U.S. Attorney O'Neill said, "We are committed to prosecuting those who seek to harm and exploit persons by fraud, violence, or force. Sex trafficking is a serious offense and must be treated as such. This case represents a major step towards restoring the victims of these terrible crimes."

Special Agent in Charge James Casey, FBI, stated, "Sex trafficking takes place outside public view, but as we've seen in this case, it is nothing less than modern-day slavery. We at the FBI will continue to work hard with our law enforcement partners and prosecutors to expose these activities and bring the offenders to justice."

"The conviction of Tyrone Townsend is good news. The issue of human trafficking remains an important focus for the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. I applaud the work of our Special Investigations Unit, as they continue to dig beyond the seemingly "typical" prostitution activity we see, and develop these human trafficking cases," said Jacksonville, FL Sheriff John Rutherford. "As always, our partnership with the US Attorney and the FBI ensures that these heinous crimes come to light and those exploiting others are brought to justice in the federal system. I am also proud of the work of the JSO as we participate with the local task force and work to educate the public on the issue of human trafficking."

This case was investigated by the FBI and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Mac D. Heavener, III.