



U. S. Department of Justice

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MORE THAN 170 CHARGED FOLLOWING A LARGE-SCALE HUMAN TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATION

19 FACE FEDERAL CHARGES

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA – More than 170 total arrests have been made on charges ranging from solicitation of prostitution to human trafficking of a minor. Nineteen defendants have been indicted on federal charges as a result of a two-year, multi-agency investigation led by the Tallahassee Police Department. Lawrence Keefe, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Florida, Tallahassee Police Chief Lawrence E. Revell, and Lorena Bueno, Assistant State Attorney for the 2nd Judicial Court, made the announcement at a press conference in Tallahassee, Florida.

“The victims of sex-trafficking crimes need our help,” said U.S. Attorney Keefe. “As a society, we must all do our part to be there for them in any way that we can. For so long as I am the United States Attorney, I will do everything I can to contribute to multi-agency efforts, to make federal resources available, and to assist your State Attorney, your police department and your sheriff as they protect our children and guard this community.”

According to Chief Revell, the investigation began in November 2018 when investigators from Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) saw that images of a minor were being posted on a website advertising sex for money. The investigation, dubbed Operation Stolen Innocence, uncovered an enormous amount of electronic evidence that required months to evaluate. This electronic evidence allowed investigators to further develop the scope and extent of the case. As a result, 72 suspects were charged with misdemeanors and notices to appear while 106 suspects were charged with felonies. Of that 106, 19 defendants face federal felony charges.

“This investigation is a testament to how diligent our investigators work to enhance the quality of life for everyone in this community, especially our vulnerable population. They worked tirelessly to bring justice to the victim in this case and were able to make an unprecedented number of human trafficking related arrests,” Chief Revell said. “I could not be prouder of the

steadfast efforts of our investigators and the joint effort with our partners to stop the illegal and dehumanizing practice of human trafficking.”

The federal charges in this case include enticement and coercion of a minor to engage in sexual activity, enticement and coercion of a minor to engage in prostitution, production and/or receipt of child pornography, transfer of obscene material to a minor, sex trafficking a minor, and conspiracy to sex traffic a minor.

“It is difficult to comprehend the depravity of these criminals who prey on the most innocent in our society,” said Kevin Sibley, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Tampa Field Office. “Thanks to the collective efforts of the Tallahassee Police Department and HSI special agents, our local communities are significantly safer today as a result of this investigation.”

These cases resulted from investigations by the Tallahassee Police Department, the Department of Homeland Security Investigations, the U.S. Marshal Service, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Leon County Sheriff’s Office. The federal cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Spaven.

An indictment is merely an allegation by a grand jury that a defendant has committed a violation of federal criminal law and is not evidence of guilt. All defendants are presumed innocent and entitled to a fair trial, during which it will be the government’s burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

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