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OFFICE OF THE
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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General James Uthmeier Announces 230 Arrests in Human Trafficking Operation



Photo Courtesy of the Office of the Attorney General

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier announced that 230 suspects will be charged for involvement in illegal acts related to soliciting prostitutes, offering to commit prostitution, or transporting prostitutes. During this investigation, twelve possible human trafficking victims were identified and immediately offered support.

“Human traffickers are vile predators who exploit the vulnerable, and once again, a disproportionate number of those arrested in this sting were illegal aliens,” **said Attorney General James Uthmeier**. “Here in Florida, we will not give these traffickers the opportunity to destroy more lives.”

“The online prostitution industry enables and empowers human traffickers, allowing them to profit off the people they exploit,” **said Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd**. “Our goal is to identify victims, offer them help, and arrest those who are fueling the exploitation of human beings

(Johns) and those profiting from the exploitation of human beings. Prostitution is not a victimless crime – it results in human exploitation, misery, disease, dysfunction, drug and alcohol addiction, violence, and broken families."

This operation was a joint effort led by the Polk County Sheriff's office in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Division, the Florida Department of Financial Services, Auburndale PD, Bartow PD, Davenport PD, Haines City PD, Lake Wales PD, Winter Haven PD, Zephyrhills PD, Highlands County Sheriff's Office, State Attorney for the Tenth Judicial Circuit Brian Haas, and Attorney General Uthmeier's Office of Statewide Prosecution.

This investigation involved a seven-day sting operation in which law enforcement utilized social media and escort-hiring platforms to make contact with the defendants. The vast majority of the defendants are repeat offenders, with a combined total of 296 felonies and 348 misdemeanors in the suspects' prior criminal histories.

The defendants include 46 illegal immigrants from Venezuela, Peru, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Cuba, Brazil, Colombia, and the Bahamas, five of whom reported that they are currently receiving financial assistance from the U.S. government.

The defendants will be charged as follows:

- **111** with felony traveling to commit prostitution
- **20** with felony aiding/abetting, transporting, or deriving proceeds from prostitutes
- **99** with misdemeanor soliciting prostitution

These cases will be prosecuted by the Office of Statewide Prosecution and State Attorney for the Tenth Judicial Circuit Brian Haas.

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