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OFFICE OF THE
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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General James Uthmeier Announces Rescue of One Hundred and Twenty Two Missing Children



Courtesy of the Office of the Attorney General

TAMPA, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier announced the results of a statewide rescue operation titled “Operation Home for the Holidays.” The historic U.S. Marshals Service-led recovery initiative located or safely recovered 122 children, making it one of the largest child-recovery operations in American history. The operation surpassed the scale and success of [Operation Dragon Eye](#), conducted earlier this year, and expanded across Tampa Bay, Orlando, Jacksonville, Fort Myers, and into nine other states. Operation Home for the Holidays resulted in six felony arrests, with additional charges expected as investigations continue.

“Thanks to one of the single largest child-rescue operations in U.S. history, 122 missing children are safe,” **said Attorney General James Uthmeier**. “This operation highlights the strength and diligence of Florida’s Law Enforcement. I am deeply grateful for everyone that made Operation Home for the Holidays a massive success. Many of these kids have been victimized in unspeakable ways. We will prosecute their abusers to the fullest extent of the law.”

“The United States Marshals Service is proud to stand with our partners across the state of Florida in pursuit of the safety and welfare of our children,” **said United States Marshal for the Middle District of Florida Bill Berger**. “This operation was built based upon the wants and needs of our communities. We are honored to play a leading role in answering those calls.”

“This operation reflects the power of strong partnerships and a shared commitment under Governor DeSantis’ leadership to protect Florida’s children,” **said FDLE Deputy Commissioner Vaden Pollard**. “By gathering critical intelligence, pursuing every lead, and working together with our federal, state, and local partners, we achieved a unified mission and delivered meaningful results—122 children and youth are now safe, and that is a victory for our entire state. ”

“Operation Home for the Holidays is a testament to what we can accomplish when we come together with urgency and shared purpose to recover Florida’s most vulnerable children,” **said Department of Children and Families Secretary Taylor N. Hatch**. “Under Governor DeSantis’ leadership, DCF continues to seize opportunities to collaborate with local, state, and federal partners to maximize our impact—this time, bringing more than 120 children to safety.”

“Under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, DJJ is proud to support the recovery of critically missing and endangered youth through Operation Home for the Holidays,” **said Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Secretary Matthew J. Walsh**. “Through collaboration with our state, federal, and local partners, we were able to locate these youth and connect them with essential services. We are grateful for this opportunity to strengthen our shared commitment to the Governor’s mission of keeping Florida’s communities safe.”

Over a two-week span, the multi-disciplinary task force proactively located vulnerable youth throughout Central Florida, including 57 children in the Tampa Bay region, 14 in Orlando, 22 in Jacksonville, and 29 in Fort Myers. The operation also resulted in recoveries in nine other states. The children ranged in age from 23 months to 17 years old, and many had experienced various levels of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or exposure to other criminal activity.

Operation Home for the Holidays was developed with a specific emphasis on rapid access to child-focused services. The investigation utilized real-time intelligence and field operations to locate missing children. Victim advocates and child welfare specialists coordinated with law enforcement partners to provide immediate resources to the rescued children.

Attorney General Uthmeier’s Office of Statewide Prosecution is taking on multiple felony cases generated by the operation, including crimes involving sexual battery on a child and custodial interference.

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