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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

VIDEO: In an Aggressive Response to Biden's Open Border Bolstering Transnational Criminal Organizations, AG Moody Announces the Rescue of 10 Human Trafficking Victims and New Statewide Strike Team



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today announced the new Florida Human Trafficking Strike Team to fight back against transnational criminal organizations exploiting Biden's open border to bring trafficking victims into the United States. The announcement of the new team follows a multiagency operation to dismantle a massive trafficking ring in the Tampa Bay area and rescue 10 victims.

The Strike Team is comprised of Attorney General Moody's Statewide Prosecutors, Florida Department of Law Enforcement analysts and agents, Hillsborough and Pasco County deputies, as well as counter-human trafficking investigators and victim advocates to assist local law enforcement in identifying and tracking down leads in trafficking cases across the state.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "Biden's border crisis is emboldening transnational criminal organizations, and as a result, we are seeing horrific human trafficking cases right here in Florida. The disturbing facts of this case highlight the need for our new statewide Strike Team, and demonstrate how this expert team of investigators, prosecutors, analysts, and victims' advocates can help coordinate efforts to take down trafficking operations and rescue victims.

Until Biden does his job and closes the border, we must continue to develop new methods to deal with international crime rings that exploit Biden's reckless agenda to perpetuate crime in Florida."

Florida Department of Law Enforcement Commissioner Mark Glass said, "By working together, we have a better chance at stopping bad actors, like the suspects in today's case, from abusing and taking advantage of victims who, in some cases, are just trying to survive. I am grateful to Attorney General Ashley Moody for her continuous support and to our agents and agency partners for their diligence in making sure these criminals can't take advantage of vulnerable people anymore."

In addition to combating trafficking directly, the team provides intelligence, guidance and support to law enforcement agencies throughout the state and is available to coordinate emergency victim support services. The team works directly with the new statewide human trafficking tip line, 855-FLA-SAFE, to quickly review reports of suspected trafficking and engage with appropriate law enforcement agencies to rescue victims.

The Florida Human Trafficking Strike Team is already assisting local law enforcement with more than 20 human trafficking cases and making contact with nearly 40 victims—including 10 victims at the center of the Lina Payne investigation. Payne recruited women from Columbia and Venezuela under promises of work opportunities, but then held the victims hostage and forced them into sex work to pay off travel debts, all under threat of violence.

The Strike Team's investigation of Payne also resulted in the arrests of accomplices Sebastian Jurado, Payne's boyfriend, and Andres Payne, Payne's son. Payne charged the women recruited from Venezuela and Colombia between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to be smuggled across the border and into the United States.

Payne promised the women legitimate work, but instead they were held in debt bondage and coerced to perform sex acts for money and pay the proceeds to the criminal organization. Payne often made threats of physical violence against the women and their families in other countries.

With the assistance of the Strike Team, authorities are in contact with at least 10 victims from the trafficking ring. The number of victims is expected to increase as the investigation continues and additional evidence is analyzed.

Each defendant faces multiple felony charges.

Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution will prosecute these cases.

To report suspicious activity, call the Florida Human Trafficking Hotline at 855-FLA-SAFE. To learn more about Attorney General Moody's and FDLE's new state anti-trafficking hotline, click [here](#).

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