

United States Attorney Announces Results Of Efforts To Combat Human Trafficking

Tampa, FL – United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg announces the results achieved to date by the Middle District of Florida to combat human trafficking. This includes trafficking of minors, forced labor, and sex trafficking of adults by force, fraud, or coercion. During fiscal year 2022, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida prosecuted 11 defendants for human trafficking offenses and has obtained \$120,861.98 in restitution for survivors. The defendants include perpetrators directly involved in trafficking, to include recruiters, enforcers, facilitators, buyers/customers, advertisers, and individuals who financially benefit from the exploitation. (See chart below for criminal case details.)

“The fight against human trafficking, a crime that harms some of the most vulnerable members of our society, is one of the highest priorities of the Middle District of Florida,” said U.S. Attorney Handberg. “We are committed to vindicating the rights of human trafficking crime victims by bringing their traffickers to justice and working to ensure that survivors have access to restitution, services, and assistance that are needed to rebuild their lives.”

Combatting human trafficking is also key priority for the Department of Justice. Earlier this year, the Attorney General released the Department of Justice's [National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking](#). The Strategy lays out the Department's multi-year plan to combat all forms of human trafficking; focusing on efforts to protect victims of trafficking, prosecute human trafficking cases, and prevent further acts of human trafficking. Information on the Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at www.justice.gov/humantrafficking.

Representative cases prosecuted by the Middle District of Florida this year include:

United States v. Henry Lee White, III – Henry Lee White, III (27) pleaded guilty and was sentenced to over 24 years in prison for sex trafficking by force, fraud, and coercion; transportation of an individual in interstate commerce for the purpose of prostitution; coercion and enticement; and being a felon in possession of ammunition. White was also ordered to pay \$87,121.98 in restitution for his crimes. According to court documents, between June 2, 2020, and January 7, 2021, White used force, threats of force, fraud, and coercion to cause the victim to engage in commercial sex. During that time, White trafficked the victim within the Middle District of Florida, and transported the victim from Florida to Georgia so that the victim could engage in prostitution. The victim was recovered during a Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force operation in January 2021.

United States v. Jamel Muldrew – Jamel Muldrew (33) pleaded guilty and was sentenced over 21 years in prison for sex trafficking a minor, coercing and enticing a minor to engage in sexual activity, using a facility of interstate commerce in aid of racketeering, and transporting a person interstate for prostitution. Muldrew was also ordered to pay \$27,740.00 in restitution for his crimes. According to court documents, an undercover officer arranged to engage in a commercial sex act with a minor victim at a local hotel. Muldrew drove the minor victim to the hotel, dropped her off, and drove to a nearby mall parking lot to wait. Law enforcement officers arrested Muldrew in the mall parking lot and searched him, recovering multiple fictitious identity documents for both himself and the minor victim. Subsequent

investigation revealed that, between February and April 2021, Muldrew had trafficked the minor victim across the country to engage in prostitution, including in Texas, New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, Georgia, and ultimately Florida, where he was arrested. The minor victim was recovered during a Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force operation in April 2021.

United States v. Bladimir Moreno et al. – Bladimir Moreno (55) pleaded guilty to conspiracy under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act and conspiracy to commit forced labor, and he is awaiting sentencing. Pursuant to his plea agreement, Moreno has agreed to pay restitution in the amount of \$173,125.44 to his victims. A federal grand jury had previously returned a six-count indictment against Moreno and others for their roles in a federal racketeering conspiracy that victimized Mexican H-2A workers who harvested fruit, vegetables, and other agricultural products in the United States. According to court documents, Moreno owned, operated, and managed Los Villatoros Harvesting (LVH), a farm labor contracting company, that functioned as a criminal enterprise that forced victims to work in Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Georgia and North Carolina. After charging Mexican farm workers exorbitant sums to come into the United States on short-term H-2A agricultural visas to work for LVH, Moreno and his co-conspirators coerced over a dozen workers into providing long hours of physically demanding agricultural labor, six to seven days a week, for very little pay. Moreno and his co-conspirators used various coercive means, including imposing debts on workers; confiscating the workers' passports; subjecting workers to crowded, unsanitary and degrading living conditions; verbally abusing and humiliating the workers; threatening workers with arrest, jail, and deportation; isolating workers by preventing them from interacting with anyone other than LVH employees; and threatening to physically harm the workers' family members back in Mexico if the workers failed to comply with their demands. Moreno and his coconspirators also harbored H-2A workers in the United States after their visas had expired, committed visa fraud and fraud in foreign labor contracting. Three co-defendants also pleaded guilty to related offenses. Christina Gamez (43) a U.S. citizen, who worked for LVH as a bookkeeper, manager, and supervisor, pleaded guilty to RICO conspiracy and agreed to pay \$9,353.91 in restitution. Efrain Cabrera Rodas (32) a citizen of Mexico, who worked for LVH as a recruiter, manager, and supervisor, also pleaded guilty to RICO conspiracy and agreed to pay \$24,732.20 in restitution. Guadalupe Mendes Mendoza (45) a citizen of Mexico, who worked for LVH as a manager and supervisor, pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct a federal investigation.

Some of the prosecutions described above were investigated by the Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force, a collaboration of local, state, and federal law enforcement agents working together with organizations to detect, investigate, and prosecute human trafficking in the Tampa Bay area. Through this multi-agency partnership, members of the task force work together to identify victims, investigate and prosecute these crimes, and support survivors by directing them to victim-centered, trauma-informed services. More information about the Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force can be found at www.justice.gov/usao-mdfl/humantrafficking.

In addition to vigorously prosecuting traffickers and customers of human trafficking, the USAO-MDFL is also committed to providing education, prevention, and technical and training assistance. Most recently, in June 2022, the USAO-MDFL led a presentation during the Circuit 5 Human Trafficking Symposium. Attendees were trained on how to identify signs of human trafficking as well as on tactics used by traffickers. Attendees included approximately 278 law-enforcement officers, prosecutors, juvenile-justice and health-care professionals, and faith-based groups, located in Citrus, Hernando, Lake, Marion, and Sumter counties.

The cases identified in the chart below have been investigated by the following agencies: Palm Beach County Human Trafficking Task Force, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, the St. Petersburg Police Department, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the

Tampa Police Department, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Investigations, with assistance from the Houston (Texas) Police Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Department of Labor – Office of the Inspector General, the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, the Department of State Diplomatic Security Service, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, the Colorado Legal Services Migrant Farm Worker Division, Legal Aid Services of Oregon Farmworker Program, the Indiana Legal Services Worker Rights and Protection Project, and Selah Freedom.

Anyone who has information about human trafficking should report that information to the National Human Trafficking Hotline toll-free at 1-888-373-7888, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information about human trafficking, please visit www.humantraffickinghotline.org. Information on the Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at www.justice.gov/humantrafficking.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

Human Trafficking Prosecutions in FY 2022			
Charged Cases			
Defendant(s) (Age)	Charge(s)	Penalties	Type of Human Trafficking
Tampa Division			
Mateus Fernandes Evangelista Da Silva (22) *	Attempted Child Sex Trafficking; and Possession of Child Pornography	Mandatory Minimum: 10 years Maximum: Life	Child Sex Trafficking
George Thayer (51)	Child Sex Trafficking; Production of Child Pornography; and Possession of Child Pornography	Mandatory Minimum: 15 years Maximum: Life	Child Sex Trafficking
<i>These human trafficking cases in the Tampa Division are being prosecuted by AUSAs Lisa M. Thelwell and Ilyssa Spergel.</i>			

Jacksonville Division			
Nicholas Christopher Carwise (31)	Attempted Child Sex Trafficking; and Enticement of a Minor	Mandatory Minimum: 10 years Maximum: Life	Child Sex Trafficking
<i>This human trafficking case from the Jacksonville Division is being prosecuted by AUSA Ashley Washington.</i>			
Adjudicated Cases			
Defendant(s) (Age)	Charge(s)	Penalties	Type of Human Trafficking
Tampa Division			
Leslie Reio (25) *	Conspiracy to Commit Child Sex Trafficking	Mandatory Minimum: 10 years Maximum: Life	Child Sex Trafficking
Bladimir Moreno (55)	Conspiracy to Commit Forced Labor; RICO Conspiracy	Maximum: 20 years	Labor Trafficking
Christina Gamez (43)	RICO Conspiracy	Maximum: 20 years	Labor Trafficking
Efrain Cabrera Rodas (32)	RICO Conspiracy	Maximum: 20 years	Labor Trafficking
Guadalupe Mendes Mendoza (45)	Conspiracy to Obstruct Federal Investigation	Maximum: 20 years	Labor Trafficking

These human trafficking cases in the Tampa Division are being prosecuted by AUSAs Erin C. Favorit and Ilyssa Spergel, and Trial Attorneys Avner Shapiro, Maryam Zhuravitsky, and Matthew Thiman of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Jacksonville Division

Mark Manuel Marino (27)	Attempted Child Sex Trafficking; Production, Receipt, and Possession of Child Pornography	Mandatory Minimum: 15 years Maximum: Life	Child Sex Trafficking
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This human trafficking case in the Jacksonville Division is being prosecuted by AUSA Kelly S. Karase.

Sentenced Cases

Tampa Division

Defendant(s) (Age)	Charge(s)	Sentence Imposed	Type of Human Trafficking	Restitution
Henry Lee White, III (27) *	Sex Trafficking by Force, Fraud, and Coercion; Felon in Possession of Ammunition	24 years, 4 months in federal prison	Adult Sex Trafficking	\$87,121.98
Julius Arline (31) *	Child Sex Trafficking	40 years in federal prison	Child Sex Trafficking	\$6,000.00
Jamel Muldrew (33) *	Child Sex Trafficking	21 years, 10 months in federal prison	Child Sex Trafficking	\$27,740.00

These human trafficking cases from the Tampa Division were prosecuted by AUSAs Lisa M. Thelwell, Erin C. Favorit, Ilyssa Spergel, and Carlton C. Gammons.

** This case was investigated and prosecuted in conjunction with the Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force of the Middle District of Florida, which is one of 13 task forces in the country to receive grant funding from the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Task Force is a collaboration of local, state, and federal law enforcement agents working together with public and private organizations to detect, investigate, and prosecute human trafficking in the Tampa Bay area. This includes trafficking of minors, forced labor, transnational sex trafficking, and sex trafficking of adults by force, fraud, or coercion. More information about the Tampa Bay Human Trafficking Task Force can be found at www.justice.gov/usao-mdfl/humantrafficking. Information on the Department of Justice's efforts to combat human trafficking can be found at www.justice.gov/humantrafficking.*

Topic(s):

Project Safe Childhood
Civil Rights
Human Trafficking

Component(s):

[USAO - Florida, Middle](#)

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