

Attorney General Schimel: Announces 5 arrests in St. Croix County anti-human trafficking & sexual predator sting; 2 trafficking victims recovered

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HUDSON, Wis. – Today, Attorney General Brad Schimel announced Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) Human Trafficking Bureau agents, with the aid of local law enforcement, have arrested five individuals in a sting to arrest sex traffickers, “johns,” and child abusers in St. Croix County, and recovered two human trafficking victims.

“The only reason human trafficking exists is because there is a demand for buying sex. Those creating the demand – the johns who buy victims, and the traffickers who are exploiting them – are not safe to exploit and coerce people in our state because law enforcement and human services are better prepared than ever to take on this insidious crime,” said Attorney General Schimel. “When I was sworn in as attorney general, I put johns on notice. We are coming for you, and for some – we already got you. These arrests will not be the last.”

In operations focused in St. Croix County, DCI agents and local law enforcement arrested five individuals in operations that targeted those seeking children for sexual purposes and “johns,” individuals who were seeking to purchase commercial sex. Some of those arrested were knowingly seeking 14- and 15-year old children for sexual purposes.

“It’s imperative that we continue to make child sex crimes and human trafficking

one of the main priorities in our region,” said St. Croix County Sheriff Scott Knudson. “We will continue our work on these cases to ensure that the most vulnerable in our communities are assisted, and the offenders are arrested. I’m pleased that the collaborative effort between DCI and our local law enforcement partners made this investigation a success, and we thank Attorney General Schimel and his office for their assistance.”

Those arrested were charged with offenses, including: attempted second degree sexual assault of a child, child enticement, requesting a nude image from a child, using a computer to facilitate a child sex crime, and soliciting a prostitute.

“The level of intra agency cooperation, demonstrating the local and state partnerships on these matters cannot be overemphasized,” said St. Croix County District Attorney Mike Nieskes. “Attorney General Schimel’s efforts in stopping human trafficking and sexual exploitation date back more than 20 years, long before his election as the attorney general. I would express my appreciation for his dedication of DOJ’s resources to these problems.”

The following organizations aided in the success of these operations in Wisconsin:

- Hudson Police Department
- New Richmond Police Department
- River Falls Police Department
- St. Croix County District Attorney’s Office
- St. Croix County Sheriff’s Office
- Turningpoint for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence

Attached are booking photos of those arrested and charged. All suspects are innocent until proven guilty.

In a statewide assessment, Wisconsin law enforcement in nearly every county in the state reported that human trafficking occurs in their community. Recognizing this growing problem, in September 2017 Attorney General Schimel established the Human Trafficking Bureau within the Division of Criminal Investigation. The bureau provides a coordinated statewide strategy to identify, target, and prosecute

traffickers in order to combat human trafficking and provide needed assistance to survivors. From September 2017 to January 1, 2018, the DOJ Human Trafficking Bureau has:

- Conducted 23 child and adult sex trafficking investigations;
- Arrested 15 child and adult sex traffickers;
- Arrested six “Johns;”
- Recovered 20 adult sex trafficking victims; and
- Recovered four child sex trafficking victims.

The attorney general’s Crime Victims Council also is working with industries that have a workforce well-positioned to see, recognize, and report human trafficking, such as the hospitality and trucking industry. In 2018, the attorney general’s council will:

- Develop industry-specific tools and conduct training with shopping mall security teams, to prevent traffickers from recruiting vulnerable youth in the mall setting;
- Engage members of multiple sectors of the transportation industry, in partnership with the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association and Truckers Against Trafficking, to train the workforce to recognize and report human trafficking; and
- Continue to work with the Wisconsin Hotel & Lodging Association and other partners to train hospitality staff to identify the signs of human trafficking and report leads to law enforcement.

DOJ encourages rural, urban, suburban and tribal public agency executives and business owners, to download and display anti-human trafficking posters. The posters can be downloaded at no cost online. For more information about human trafficking in Wisconsin, and how you can help individuals who have been trafficked, go to www.BeFreeWisconsin.com.