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Police investigate report of 'human trafficking prostitution ring'

By Elizabeth Dinan
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February 09, 2012 2:30 PM

PORTSMOUTH — An investigation into a multi-state human trafficking operation, which included crimes in Portsmouth, was launched Tuesday when a victim told her story to another New Hampshire police agency, said Deputy Police Chief Stephen DuBois.

The victim told police she was part of a "human trafficking prostitution ring" which operated in Portsmouth in October of 2011, said DuBois. The deputy police chief said the alleged victim is an adult and he defined the human trafficking allegation as someone being forced to surrender personal property and/or "more or less held against their will."

According to federal authorities, human trafficking most often involves the victimization of women and children for sex crimes, but also includes forced labor. DuBois said city police have taken over the case for the police agency which initially received the report and will be working with law enforcement officials from other states.

He said because the crimes are alleged to have crossed state lines, federal agencies will also be involved.

"It's fresh information and an active investigation," he said.

According to the deputy police chief, the alleged crimes occurred at a hotel near the traffic circle.

Portsmouth police conducted a prostitution sting at a traffic circle hotel in April of 2011 when three men were arrested for soliciting sex from an informant working with police. One of them, a former police officer, is scheduled for trial on Feb. 21.

Mark A. Valli, 52, of 3 Birch St., Newburyport, Mass., a former Amesbury, Mass., police officer, is charged with a misdemeanor charge of soliciting prostitution. He is pleading not guilty and is expected to dispute the charge during a trial.

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