
FBI, Malden police cooperate in nationwide prostitution sting

Posted by Matt Byrne

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The FBI released a compilation of raw footage from the investigations that took place over three days across the country to stamp out teenage sex trafficking.

By Matt Byrne, Town Correspondent

Police in three Massachusetts cities last week arrested three alleged pimps, 11 other suspects on prostitution and drug charges, and took one underage girl off the streets.

The three-day undercover nationwide effort, called Operation Cross Country, was organized by the Federal Bureau of Investigation with cooperation from local police departments and the State Police. In Massachusetts, it ensnared 14 suspects in Malden, Saugus, and West Springfield, with the particular goal of targeting teenage sex trafficking.

"The goal is to recover juveniles that are sucked into this so called vacuum of prostitution, and to treat them as victims and not arrestees," said Malden Police Lieutenant Marc Gatcomb, who helped coordinate the Malden operation. "A lot of these individuals are viewed as victims now, too, under human trafficking [laws]."

In some of the cases, detectives and FBI agents used online listings advertising escort and companionship services to set up meetings with the alleged prostitutes, and deployed marked bills and other investigative methods to track the cash to the pimps, according to police reports filed in Lynn District Court.

In 2011, Governor Deval Patrick signed into law a measure enhancing the maximum penalty for underage sex trafficking, to life in prison. The law also reinforces the role of the Department of Children and Families in cases where children are trafficked, according to a statement by the Patrick administration.

"Child prostitution remains a major threat to children across America," said Kevin L. Perkins, acting executive assistant director of the FBI's Criminal, Cyber, Response and Services Branch. "It is a violent and deplorable crime, and we are working with our partners to disrupt and put behind bars individuals and members of criminal enterprises who would sexually exploit children."

From Thursday through Saturday, more than 2,500 state, local, and federal officers working in 57 cities to rescue 79 children and arrested 104 alleged pimps, the FBI announced Monday.

Two of those arrested in Saugus were Dion D. Dottin, 36, of 42 Almont St. in Medford, and Jonathan E. Brown of 72 Woodbole Ave. in Mattapan, according to court records. Both were charged with one count of trafficking of persons for sexual servitude and two counts of deriving support from prostitution.

Both pleaded not guilty at a Friday arraignment in Lynn, and were ordered held on \$10,000 and \$25,000 bail, respectively, by Judge Ellen Flatley. They are due back in court July 19 for a probable cause hearing.

In all, 11 people in Massachusetts were charged with exchanging sexual conduct for a fee. The three arrested in Malden included Erica Campbell, 18, of Boston; Berthe St. Louis, 26, of Mattapan; and Jose Diener, 19, of Methuen.

Karen Akiba, 22, of 10 Jacques St. in Somerville, pleaded guilty to one count of intent to distribute a class-D substance after police found in her possession of a scale and 11 bags that appeared to contain marijuana, worth about \$10 each June 21 in Saugus.

Akiba is due back in Lynn court July 19 for a pretrial hearing.

In West Springfield, charged with exchanging sexual conduct for a fee were Jennifer Scholle, 35; Nereida Reyes, 24; and Savannah Callandret, 20, who are all from Rhode Island, according to a report published Monday in The Springfield Republican.

The only minor caught up in the arrests was an unidentified 17-year-old girl who police found waiting in a car outside of a hotel where officers had arranged to meet one of the suspects. The under-age girl was not charged and was released, The Republican reported.

"She was not taken into custody because she had done nothing wrong," Interim West Springfield Police Chief Ronald P. Campurciani told the newspaper.

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