

Beat: News

Two Maryland Residents Guilty of Sex Trafficking of Minors

Victims Forced to Turn Over All Proceeds

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USPA NEWS - Willis Lewis, 48, and Brittany Jones, 32, have been found guilty by a jury of federal charges, including sex trafficking by force, fraud, and coercion, sex trafficking of minors, and related offenses, in connection with their trafficking of a 15-year-old girl and a 17-year-old girl between April and May of 2019.

The announcement was made by U.S. Attorney Matthew M. Graves, Wayne A. Jacobs, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Washington Field Office Criminal Division, and Robert J. Contee III, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD).

The verdict was returned May 23, 2022, following a trial in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. Lewis, of Oxon Hill, Maryland, and Jones, of Suitland, Maryland, remain in custody. The Honorable Royce C. Lamberth scheduled sentencing for Sept. 2, 2022.

According to the government's evidence, Jones, working with two co-conspirators who since pleaded guilty, brought the two victims to Lewis for the purposes of trafficking them. After they were in Lewis's custody, Lewis, along with another co-conspirator, set up "dates" for the two girls each day for almost two weeks and Lewis pocketed the money that the two girls made from these dates. Lewis used a loyalty contract, a firearm, and acts of violence committed against the co-conspirator in front of the victims to coerce the victims into performing commercial sex for his profit. Law enforcement became involved in this investigation after the two victims ran away from a residential facility in Virginia and the facility filed a missing person's report.

At trial, the co-conspirators testified against Lewis and Jones and were corroborated by independent evidence, including material from the digital devices and cell phone location data.

Both defendants were arrested on July 30, 2019.

This case was investigated by the FBI Washington Field Office's Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force. The task force is composed of FBI agents, along with other federal agents and detectives from northern Virginia and the District of Columbia, including the Metropolitan Police Department. The task force is charged with investigating and bringing federal charges against individuals engaged in the exploitation of children and those engaged in human trafficking.

This case was brought as part of the Department of Justice's Project Safe Childhood initiative. In February 2006, the Attorney General created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Led by the U.S. Attorney's Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

In announcing the verdict, U.S. Attorney Graves, Special Agent in Charge Jacobs, and Chief Contee commended the work of the MPD Detectives and Special Agents of the FBI Child Exploitation Task Force, as well as the MPD's Human Trafficking Unit. They also acknowledged the efforts of those who handled the case for the U.S. Attorney's Office and Justice Department, including Paralegal Specialists Genevieve De Guzman, Karla Nunez, and Irina Tchernoskoutova, and Victim/Witness Advocate Yvonne Bryant.

Finally, they commended the work of Trial Attorney Elizabeth Hutson of the Justice Department Criminal Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Janani Iyengar, who investigated and prosecuted the matter.

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

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