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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Attorney General James Uthmeier and U.S. Marshal William Berger Announce the Rescue of Sixty Missing Children in Central Florida

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General James Uthmeier joined the U.S. Marshal for the Central District of Florida William Berger to announce the rescue of 60 children as part of Operation Dragon Eye in the Tampa Bay Area. As a result of the operation, eight defendants were arrested, including one on charges of human trafficking.

"The real heroes behind this operation are the law enforcement who built and executed this mission. As your Attorney General and a father of three young kids, protecting children is my top priority," **said Attorney General James Uthmeier**. "If you victimize children, you're going to prison, end of story."

"The unique part of this operation was the fact that underaged critically missing children ranging from age 9 to 17 were not only recovered but were debriefed and provided with physical and psychological care," said **U.S. Marshal William Berger**. "This operation further included follow-up assistance in hopes that these youth will not return back to the streets to be further victimized."

"60 kids saved. That number sends the message that Florida will never be a safe place for traffickers," said **FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass**. "At FDLE, we will continue to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. And to any family still missing their child, we will never stop searching until we make sure they are brought home safely."

"Under the steadfast leadership of Governor DeSantis, the Florida Department of Children and Families remains unrelenting when it comes to the protection, safety, and well-being of some of the most vulnerable Floridians – our children. DCF is proud to work alongside its federal, state, and local partners in this united mission," said **Department of Children and Families Secretary Taylor Hatch**. "I am appreciative of our DCF team members and key partners that provided critical information, helped shape recovery protocols, and secured safe housing and ongoing supports to ensure that every child recovered was met with care and compassion."

Operation Dragon Eye, led by the U.S. Marshal's Office with legal counsel provided by the Office of Statewide Prosecution, included efforts from 20 agencies.

Attorney General Uthmeier's OSP is the lead prosecuting authority with assistance from the State Attorneys of the Sixth and Thirteenth Judicial Circuits. Special Counsel Rita Peters will prosecute the human trafficking case, with two other human trafficking cases still under

investigation.

The eight defendants face charges ranging from human trafficking, child endangerment, drug possession, and drug trafficking.

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