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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Prosecutors File Charges Against Operator of Human Trafficking Ring

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution filed charges against a South Florida man operating a human trafficking ring following an investigation by the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. According to the investigation, Orlith Joseph organized, promoted and profited from a sex trafficking ring involving victims coerced by controlled substances and extreme acts of violence.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This predator targeted and recruited at-risk victims and exploited their vulnerability by coercing them into sex trafficking using extreme violence and perpetuating harmful drug addictions. One of these victims was just 14-years-old. As a mother, I am incredibly disturbed and heartbroken by this monster's complete disregard for human life. I am grateful for the work by the law enforcement officers that brought these victims to safety and know my Statewide Prosecutors will seek justice."

According to the investigation, Joseph targeted, recruited and groomed victims for trafficking through online advertisements on the website BackPage.com, a marketplace known for buying and selling sex. Joseph often used addictive drugs, most often heroin, as the sole form of payment for the victims, concealed as a payment, but used to keep the victims addicted and unable to seek a way out. Interviews with victims revealed when victims attempted to refuse carrying out sexual acts, Joseph used extreme violence, including strangling and beating victims in the head to avoid visible injuries.

The investigation revealed one of Joseph's victims was a 14-year-old runaway reported missing multiple times from 2016 to 2019. The victim met one of Joseph's co-conspirators through a mutual drug dealer who brought the victim to Joseph's hotel room where Joseph first had sex with the victim to see what money the victim would be worth online. Joseph began posting photos of the victim for online advertisements and paying the victim in doses of narcotics. The victim eventually escaped by creating a false job requiring an Uber ride.

A second victim, identified through the investigation as a 26-year-old, met Joseph through a mutual friend the victim met while in rehab. Joseph offered the victim heroin to stay at the hotel. Once the victim accepted the drugs, Joseph stated the victim could not leave until the drugs were paid for, suggesting sex as an acceptable form of payment. After the victim refused, Joseph seized the victim's driver's license and took a photo of the given address, threatening to follow the victim home. The victim refused to work and attempted to flee on several occasions, being caught by Joseph and beaten, deprived of food or showers as punishment. At one point, the victim became extremely ill with jaundice, was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with liver failure and Hepatitis C. After being discharged, the victim refused to continue working for

Joseph and fled to a car. Joseph followed and began beating and strangling the victim. The victim found refuge in a hotel lobby where police were called.

A third victim, introduced to Joseph through a drug deal, agreed to work for him in exchange for payment for hotel stays and heroin. The victim and Joseph began to argue about photos of the victim posted online. Joseph began beating the victim in response. The victim escaped by fleeing the scene of an assigned job.

Joseph is charged with two counts of human trafficking of a child and human trafficking causing great bodily harm, each life felonies, lewd or lascivious battery on a child and deriving support from proceeds of prostitution, each second degree felonies, and trafficking in heroin, a first degree felony. If convicted, Joseph faces life in prison. Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Justin Chapman, of the Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution, will prosecute the case.