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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Guilty Verdict Secured in Human Trafficking Case

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution secured a guilty verdict against a man on human trafficking charges. A sting operation captured Claude Ramsey responding to an advertisement on Backpage.com for commercial sex acts with minor children. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division seized Backpage.com last year as part of an ongoing federal investigation into sex trafficking. A Pinellas County jury found Ramsey guilty on counts of human trafficking of a minor, online solicitation, traveling to meet a minor and unlawful use of a two-way communications device.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This case should serve as a warning to parents that predators will utilize technology to try and contact and harm your child. This case should also serve as a warning to predators that local, state and federal law enforcement agencies are working around the clock to make sure you pay for your crimes."

Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent James Spero said, "HSI Special Agents investigate cases in which criminals utilize the internet to attempt to exploit children within our community. HSI will continue to work with our law enforcement partners, like the Largo Police Department, targeting criminals who prey on the most vulnerable members of society."

On Oct. 6, 2016, Homeland Security Investigations Tampa Public Safety Group and the Largo Police Department conducted an undercover operation targeting subjects utilizing the internet to pay for and engage in commercial sex acts with minors. Ramsey responded to that advertisement and an undercover agent corresponded through text messaging to negotiate the sex act.

During the text exchange, the undercover agent explicitly stated on more than one occasion that a 14-year-old female would be sold for commercial sex. Despite the repeated notifications, Ramsey proceeded to make the appointment at an undercover location. An hour after the conversation, Ramsey arrived with five condoms and $278 in cash. Largo Police Department arrested Ramsey near the undercover location in Clearwater.

The Attorney General's OSP charged Ramsey with human trafficking of a minor, traveling to meet a minor, online solicitation of a guardian and the unlawful use of a two-way communications device. The sentencing is scheduled for July 1. Assistant Statewide Prosecutors Julie Sercus and Jessica Costello prosecuted the case.

Another man arrested during the operation, Jose Antonio Tapia Mora, previously entered a plea of guilty to one count of human trafficking of a minor and one count of traveling to meet a minor.

In April 2018, Tapia Mora was sentenced to 69 months in prison followed by 10 years of sex offender probation. As a result of these convictions, both Ramsey and Tapia Mora will be registered sex offenders.