Mar 12, 2019

Contact Kylie Mason

Phone 850-245-0150

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STATE OF FLORIDA

Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Successful Human Trafficking Conviction

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today met with State Attorney Ed Brodsky and discussed a major human trafficking case that resulted in a successful conviction in Manatee County. The State Attorney's Office for the 12th Judicial Circuit prosecuted Juan Cruz, Jr. for detaining women and forcing them into prostitution. On Friday, a jury found Cruz guilty on two counts of human trafficking and four counts of deriving support from the proceeds of prostitution.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "As Chair of the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking, I commend State Attorney Brodsky's Office on their successful prosecution. Human trafficking is an abominable crime that must be met with firm justice. Thanks to their hard work and the great work of the Manatee County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, this case demonstrates that Florida will not tolerate human trafficking."

State Attorney Ed Brodsky said, "Our office is genuinely committed to serving and protecting all of our citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable to exploitation. These prosecutions allow us to give a voice to victims who have long suffered in silence. We have dedicated, passionate prosecutors who work with human trafficking victims with the compassion and empathy they deserve. These efforts are clearly paying off as evidenced by the jury's recent verdict against Juan Cruz."

The case revealed that Cruz targeted women addicted to drugs and often homeless. After luring vulnerable women with shelter, food and drugs, Cruz set up encounters with men using the website BackPage. Cruz then continued to give victims large amounts of crack and heroin to keep them under control. The case also revealed that Cruz forced one of the victims to prostitute herself more than 100 times. Cruz physically abused the women and confined them in storage units for hours at a time.

In November 2017, the Manatee County Sheriff's Office arrested Cruz after one of the human trafficking victims escaped and fled to authorities. Prior to being arrested for this case, Cruz was registered as a sex offender and known as a repeat offender. Cruz currently faces a maximum sentence of 120 years in prison for involvement in this human trafficking ring.

###

Attorney General Ashley Moody chairs the Statewide Council on Human Trafficking that was created by the legislature to combat human trafficking and support victims. The 15-member Council uses state and local partnerships to develop overall policy recommendations to fight human trafficking. The members of the Council include law enforcement officers, prosecutors, legislators, as well as experts in the fields of health, education and social services.