

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Prosecuting Child Sexual Exploitation

One of the highest priorities of the U.S. Department of Justice is protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Few are as vulnerable as the young victims of child sex trafficking and the production of child pornography.

In a Report to the District posted three years ago, I discussed this office's efforts to prosecute cases involving the sex trafficking of children. (Report #25, April 2012.) While we prosecute a range of child pornography and sexual abuse cases, we have continued to focus on the most egregious cases involving defendants who physically exploit and endanger children.

Last month, a Sacramento woman was sentenced to 24 years in prison for recruiting four teenaged victims to engage in commercial sexual activity. The evidence in the case established that she targeted vulnerable girls and runaways, plied them with drugs and alcohol, and transported them to multiple cities. She brandished a handgun and threatened violence to keep the victims under control. In another case sentenced last month, a man from Butte County got 29 years in prison for luring young girls over the internet with promises of money or a modeling contract to send him explicit photos, and then used the photos to extort sex acts from them. A third person sentenced last month received over 10 years in prison for recruiting a 15 year-old girl into his prostitution business.

In April, after a four-day jury trial in Fresno, a Colorado man was convicted of multiple counts of sexual exploitation of a child and kidnapping. The evidence admitted at trial proved that he visited friends in Bakersfield on multiple occasions, and would slip out of their home at night with their toddler, take the child to a hotel room, and commit sex acts which he filmed and distributed online. After an 11-day trial in another case in Sacramento in December, a man was convicted of sex trafficking five victims, all vulnerable young women or minors. The evidence in that case showed that he used threats and violence to intimidate and coerce his victims. The defendants in both cases will be sentenced later this summer, and each faces the possibility of life in prison.

Defendants in these cases are getting very long sentences at a time when crowded prisons are a concern, and sentences in some other types of cases are trending lower. But these are some of the most horrific crimes seen in federal courts, in which defendants degrade and abuse their victims. Some pimps tattoo their monikers on their victims, as if they were branding livestock. The scars, both physical and psychological, can last a lifetime.

Prosecuting these cases can be difficult and emotionally challenging. But the Assistant U.S. Attorneys who handle these cases are passionate about their work, and strongly committed to the welfare of the victims. Their role is not only to take dangerous people off the streets, but to try to rescue children from a life of violence and exploitation.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner