



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

KEVIN R. STEELE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

EDWARD F. McCANN, JR.

FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY

COURTHOUSE

P.O. BOX 311

NORRISTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

19404-0311

MARK A. BERNSTIEL

CHIEF COUNTY DETECTIVE

JESSE S. KING

CHIEF OF STAFF

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S FAX

COUNTY DETECTIVE BUREAU

(610) 278-3090

(610) 278-3095

(610) 278-3368

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ESTABLISHES TASK FORCE TO COMBAT CHILD EXPLOITATION, HUMAN TRAFFICKING, FIND MISSING CHILDREN Handles first case this week

NORRISTOWN, Pa. (May 25, 2021) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele, the Montgomery County Police Chiefs Association and Mission Kids' Executive Director Leslie Slingsby announce the creation of a special investigative task force—Human Trafficking/Child Exploitation Task Force—which will assist local police departments in finding and helping missing children who are in danger of being trafficked for sex.

According to FBI statistics, less than one percent of the more than 400,000 missing children each year were abducted. The vast majority of missing children are runaways that could be subjected to the dangers of being trafficked or forced into performing sex for money or drugs. To combat this issue, Montgomery County has formed the Human Trafficking/Child Exploitation Task Force with the specific goal of identifying, searching for and recovering runaways who are at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking.

“Trafficking women and children—forcing them into having sex for money or drugs—is an all-too-frequent crime that happens even though residents may not hear much about it. The most vulnerable population to fall prey to that victimization are children who have run away,” said DA Steele. “Finding these missing children and helping them takes extraordinary resources, so we’ve come together to form this Human Trafficking/Child Exploitation Task Force under the direction of the Montgomery County Detective Bureau’s Special Victim Unit to provide the needed expertise and resources to help these children.”

The new Task Force, developed in collaboration with Mission Kids Child Advocacy Center and the Montgomery County Office of Children & Youth, will be led by Montgomery County Det. Kathleen Kelly. The first seven members of the Task Force from five Montgomery County Police Departments were sworn in last week: Abington Det. Jeff Anderson, Conshohocken Det. Bill Walter, Hatfield Det. Alex Marchak, Pottstown Det. Brooke Hatfield, Pottstown Det. Todd Istenes, Upper Merion Det. Jay Nakahara and Upper Merion Det. Mike Davis.

The Task Force immediately sprang into action on its first case this week after a 15-year-old girl ran away from a location in Montgomery County. She was found within 24 hours in a hotel in Atlantic City and safely returned. It was the collaboration of Task Force detectives and New Jersey State Police that led to the quick return of the teenager, who was unharmed.

“Task Force members have extensive experience in investigations involving children, and their police chiefs were generous in allowing them to be a part of this important work,” said Steele. “I want to thank Abington Chief Patrick Molloy, Conshohocken Chief George Metz, Hatfield Chief William Tierney, Pottstown Chief Mick Markovitch and Upper Merion Police Chief Thomas Nolan. Without their support, the important work of this Task Force would not be possible.”

Children who runaway often run to other jurisdictions, like Philadelphia or out-of-state. Because of this issue, police response can become complicated when it is clear that the child is no longer local and the child’s exact whereabouts is unknown. Referring children to the Task Force are will be a cooperative effort, with input from police departments, Pennsylvania State Police, Juvenile Probation, Mission Kids, Montgomery County Office of Children & Youth and the Montgomery County Detective Bureau, as well as our federal partners. Once it is determined a child is at-risk for being trafficked and exploited, Task Force members will initiate an investigation to assist the primary police jurisdiction with the ultimate goal of finding and safeguarding the child.

“As we have seen with recent arrests, human traffickers keep their victims held hostage and force them into sexual servitude,” said Steele. “We need to help save this vulnerable population and bring them home.”

Approved for release,

Kevin R. Steele