



VISALIA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Jason Salazar, Chief of Police

Liz Jones, Public Safety Police & Fire PIO,
Media & Communications Manager
(559) 713-4370 (office) / (559) 713-4807 (fax)
Elizabeth.Jones@visalia.city

NEWS RELEASE

February 21, 2024

Multi-Agency Operation Leads to 12 Arrests in Underage Human Trafficking Crackdown

Last week, the Visalia Police Department collaborated with multiple agencies in a four-day operation resulting in the arrest of 12 suspects. These individuals face charges related to contacting a minor for sexual purposes.

For more details, refer to the Department of Justice Press Release provided below:

SACRAMENTO – California Attorney General Rob Bonta today announced the results of a human trafficking operation, targeting sexual predators using the Internet to seek out potential victims. Over the course of the four-day operation, twelve suspects were arrested and charged with contacting a minor for sexual purposes. The Fresno Human Trafficking Sexual Predator Apprehension (HT-SPAT), the Visalia Police Department (VPD), the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) joined forces in the multi-jurisdictional operation, which occurred from February 13 to February 16, 2024.

"The exploitation of children is not something my office will tolerate," said Attorney General Rob Bonta. "The National Center of Missing and Exploited Children and the FBI estimate there are 500,000 online predators active each and every day. These numbers are a stark reminder to us all of the work that needs to still be done – and reaffirm my office's commitment to work every day to provide human trafficking victims service, and to apprehend and arrest their traffickers. I would like to thank the efforts of our partners who helped conduct this operation. When we work together, we get results."

"We organize operations like this to diminish the presence of online child predators and combat the exploitation of children in our communities," said Visalia Police Captain Andy Swarthout. "Through these partnerships, our collective focus is on our shared mission to eradicate child exploitation."

Agents and officers used undercover identities to pose as minors online who were solicited by adults for the purpose of committing sexual acts. As agents were solicited by the suspects, the suspects were directed to an area where they were eventually apprehended and arrested. All suspects were booked into the Tulare County Jail and were charged with Penal Code Section 288.3 - contacting a minor for sexual purposes and Penal Code Section 288.4 - meeting with a minor for sexual purposes.



[The CA DOJ Victims' Services Unit \(VSU\) works](#) in conjunction with victim service providers and all across the state to provide victim-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally-sensitive support services to all crime victims, including underserved, at-risk, underrepresented, and vulnerable populations. More information about VSU is available at oag.ca.gov/victimservices or by calling (877) 433-9069 or emailing VSU at VictimServices@doj.ca.gov.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery where perpetrators profit from the control and exploitation of adults and children for sex or labor through force, fraud, or coercion. Human trafficking does not require movement across borders. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, there were more than 1,300 human trafficking cases reported in California in 2021 — more than any other state in the nation. In California, human trafficking is prevalent in the hospitality, commercial sex, domestic work, and construction industries. Victims of human trafficking are also found among migrant and seasonal agricultural workers, providers of residential care, and in California's garment sector.

If you or someone you know is being forced to engage in any activity and cannot leave, you can call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888 to access help and services. If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 9-1-1. Additional information and resources to support survivors of human trafficking is available [here](#).

