
NEWS

Five from St. Paul charged in sex trafficking ring

By **ELIZABETH MOHR** | Pioneer Press

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The Ramsey County attorney's office Tuesday charged five St. Paul adults for their alleged involvement in a multistate sex trafficking ring that involved minor girls, and officials had a strong message for traffickers and johns: "We are coming after you."

Prosecutors allege the prostitution ring was operated by Suwan Dominique Cross, 19; Doris Marie Keller, 38; Yolanda Katrice Foster, 28; Thomas William Evans, 25; and Ishmael Jamaine Williams, 19.

The defendants are charged with seven felonies each, including sex trafficking a minor, sex trafficking an individual and conspiracy to commit felony sex trafficking.

"All of this is being driven and funded by men who believe it's OK to pay for sex with vulnerable girls and women," Ramsey County Attorney John Choi said at a news conference announcing the charges.

"So my message to the johns or the commercial sex purchasers out there is: 40 percent of this (trafficking) activity involves children and it is a felony. And we are getting better at investigating these cases and we are employing new tools and new tactics to ensure that we are also paying attention to the demand side of the equation."

According to the charges, St. Paul police began an investigation in September by contacting girls and women who appeared in ads on Backpage.com, a website commonly used to advertise prostitution services. An undercover officer set up a meeting with a female known as Ms. Juicy, who turned out to be 17 years old.

When the undercover officer arrived for the meeting, Keller, Williams and Evans were in the vicinity and visible to officers. Evans fled in a vehicle when backup officers arrived, according to the criminal complaints. Foster and Cross later were located nearby.

Investigators call Evans, Keller, Foster, Williams and Cross “co-conspirators in a sex trafficking ring,” saying they posted online ads, coordinated appointments with johns, provided transportation for the females and collected payments, according to the charges.

Six females are listed in complaints as the alleged victims of the trafficking, some dating to October 2013, including the 17-year-old “Ms. Juicy” and a 16-year-old girl the defendants met in St. Paul; a woman, now 20, they met in St. Paul; a woman, also now 20, they met in the Dallas-Fort Worth area; a woman, now 24, they met in St. Paul; and a 21-year-old woman whose interactions are not detailed in the complaints.

The trafficking took place in St. Paul, Brooklyn Park and Maplewood in Minnesota; Milwaukee and Racine in Wisconsin; Memphis, Tenn.; and Chicago. The work included walking the streets and meeting johns at home or hotels, the complaints said. Online ads reportedly were placed in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois.

One underage girl told investigators she’d been “trafficked out of more than 10 hotels in the Twin Cities area between July and the end of August,” the complaints said. Another female said she was meeting with about seven johns a day, making about \$400 to \$500, which was turned over to the traffickers, according to the charges.

The defendants provided clothing, food and housing for the females. The males are accused of being violent and verbally abusive toward the women and girls, the complaints said.

Choi said that he believes more victims exist, and the investigation is continuing.

He and Assistant St. Paul Police Chief Bill Martinez said sex trafficking investigations are complex, but the approach is victim-centered.

Martinez cautioned that “sex trafficking is not welcome in St. Paul” and issued a warning: “For you individuals out there that are trafficking these young women, be afraid because we are coming after you and we’re going to bring you to justice.”

Choi said the trafficking demand is a problem that arrests, and one that prosecutions alone can’t solve.

“It’s also about prevention and the socialization of boys and men,” Choi said.

“How is it that a boy grows up to be a man and believes that it’s OK to purchase another human being for sex? How is it OK a boy grows up to be a man to sell a vulnerable girl — somebody who has emotional issues and has run away from home — how does that happen? I think that’s something our community needs to address.”

In December, Williams reportedly was stopped at the Ramsey County Courthouse with a knife in his pocket, prompting a review of security procedures. He was charged with possession of a dangerous weapon in a courthouse and is set to go to trial March 23. His criminal history includes charges of trespassing, theft, disorderly conduct and traffic violations.

Evans’ criminal history includes 2012 charges for burglary and drugs. He pleaded guilty to burglary in Ramsey County District Court in January and is to be sentenced this month.

Foster’s record includes alleged traffic violations. Keller has a 1995 conviction for check forgery and giving a false name to police.

Cross, whose first name appears in public records as Suwan and Suwuan, has been charged with theft five times. In 2012, Cross was the victim of a drug overdose that led to the death of her best friend and criminal charges against two men.

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