



Seven face sex-trafficking charges

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Seven people are facing charges of sex trafficking, accused of luring the victims with promises of money or drugs, or threatening them with violence.

Martin Pullin, 23, was charged with sex trafficking of a minor. Others charged with sex trafficking of a minor and conspiracy to sex traffic minors were Stephen Jones, 27; Kasandra Weeks, 22; Leosha Allen, 21; Thaddeus Grice, 36; Maraida Echevarria, 25; and Christian Nartey, 23.

Jones and Weeks also are charged with trafficking of an adult through the use of force.

"They're kids.

Once you start talking to them, they want the help."

GATES POLICE CHIEF JIM VANBREDERODE

Echevarria and Nartey also are charged with transporting a minor across state lines to engage in sex trafficking.

The ages of the victims ranged from 14 to early 20s. U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul said Wednesday at a news conference at the Kenneth B. Keating Federal Building.

"The victims in many cases were singled out because they were identified as being vulnerable," Hochul said. "Sometimes the recruiting occurred over social media sites."

"In the case of Jones, he specifically visited social services sites and women's shelters where, by his experience, he knew victims frequently left these particular locations at set times of day," Hochul said.

They allegedly lured the victims with promises of money and drugs or threats and actual incidents of violence, he said.

The accused allegedly posted daily advertisements on Backpage.com and other sites, then had the victims engage in prostitution in and around Rochester, areas around the state and New Jersey in 2013 and 2014. In some instances, the sex acts allegedly took place in the Rochester homes of Jones, Pullin and Echevarria, court documents said.

Weeks and Allen had a relationship with Jones, according to court documents. Weeks, Allen, Nartey and Echevarria are also alleged to have overseen the prostitutes' activities while Jones was in jail.

Law enforcement first became aware of the alleged sex trafficking in 2014 after a sting operation performed by the Gates Police Department.

Gates Police Chief Jim VanBrederode said his department watches for online advertisements that appear to solicit sex. The department set up a sting last spring and found a 14-year-old girl who was involved. After talking with her, they started an investigation.

"They're kids. Once you start talking to them, they want the help," he said. "There's a lot of good that comes out of this."

Many of the girls came from Monroe County suburbs, he said.

"We're saving some lives, it's not just a dog-and-pony show," VanBrederode said about the prostitution stings that he said sometimes draw criticism.

"We see the bad things that come out of prostitu-

tion," he said, adding that many of the victims have substance-abuse problems. "The 14-year-old visit-

ed us in the last couple weeks and personally thanked everyone for saving her life," he said. The seven were de-

tained and are expected back in court next week. Several local agencies, including the Rochester Police Department, the

Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Monroe County District Attorney's Office and the Brighton and Gates police departments

assisted the FBI in the investigation.

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