



Willingboro woman accused of promoting prostitution was victim of human trafficking ring, source says

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The 18-year-old South Jersey woman **arrested last month on charges she recruited a girl to be a prostitute** was herself a victim of the Hudson County human trafficking ring recently broken up by federal and state investigators, a source with knowledge of the investigation said.

Authorities say the men who ran the prostitution ring **forced a 14-year-old girl to have sex with up to 10 men a day** in and around Hudson County, adding that the leader used violence and threats to control the girl and the 18-year-old Willingboro woman, who was also forced to become a prostitute.

Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman announced the arrests yesterday of Michael A. McLeod, 24, of Jersey City, the alleged "boss" of the prostitution ring, and his alleged assistants David Powell Jr., 28, of Jersey City, Tyree D. Jeter, 27, of Jersey City, and Demetrius James Hayward, 19, of Summerville, S.C. All were charged with conspiracy, human trafficking and promoting prostitution of a minor.

However, the 18-year-old woman -- whose name is being withheld to protect her identity as a victim -- is currently being held at Hudson County jail on a \$15,000 bail, according to jail records.

She is charged with promoting prostitution, endangering the welfare of a child, soliciting sexual activity for something of economic value, and drug charges, according to a criminal complaint obtained by The Jersey Journal last month.

The investigation began in April when the FBI Child Exploitation Task Force received a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that photos of the 14-year-old victim were being used in ads for a "female escort" on backpage.com.

An undercover detective with the FBI called the number and arranged a "date" for April 9 at a motel room in Secaucus, authorities said.

The detective was met at the motel by the 14-year-old girl as well as the 18-year-old victim. After the 14-year-old girl offered the detective sex for money, officers entered the motel room and took custody of the two teenagers.

"Steps have been taken to ensure that (the 14-year-old) is protected and to make sure we're looking out for her interests," said Peter Aseltine, a spokesman for Hoffman's office.

The criminal complaint from the 18-year-old's arrest stated she offered to accept \$400 from an undercover officer "in exchange for sexual activity.

According to the document, she recruited the younger girl to become a prostitute and posted her name on backpage.com on several occasions, including April 9 at the Royal Motel on Route 3 in Secaucus. The woman made her first court appearance on the charges April 10.

Meanwhile, McLeod, who is accused of heading up the prostitution ring, is also charged with aggravated assault. Authorities say he held a gun to the head of the 18-year-old and threatened to kill her recently when he accused her of disrespecting him. Other times, he beat and kicked her, authorities said.

McLeod's bid to have his bail reduced this afternoon was rejected at a court hearing.

All four men are being held in the Hudson County Jail with bail set at \$400,000. The men face 20 years to life on the human trafficking charge and 10 to 20 years on the other first-degree charges of human trafficking and promoting prostitution of a person under 18.

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