



NEWS RELEASE

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

For release: July 7, 2017

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Third charged with human trafficking of a minor

Two previously charged with forcing 16-year-old girl into prostitution

Howard County police have charged a third person with human trafficking after an investigation revealed that three suspects were working together to force a 16-year-old girl into prostitution.

Jessica Lynn Smitherman, 31, of Brooklyn Bridge Road in Laurel, was charged with human trafficking in a case that occurred in late May and early June. Investigators believe that Smitherman conspired with Andre Lamar Russell, 28, of Dulwick Court in Laurel, and Heather Lynn Harding, 23, of Woodbine Road in Woodbine to force the teen into prostitution at motels in Jessup. Russell and Harding were arrested June 1. Detectives issued a warrant for Smitherman's arrest and she was located and charged June 30. Smitherman is being held on \$35,000 bond at the Howard County Detention Center.

Through investigation, detectives learned that Smitherman helped coordinate prostitution appointments and forced the teen to perform sex acts for money, which Russell would then take for himself. Detectives believe Smitherman took photos of the teen that were then posted on the website Backpage, which is known to be used for prostitution, advertising sexual services with the victim.

Russell was indicted June 14 on multiple counts of human trafficking, human trafficking conspiracy, assault and drug charges. He is being held on no bond. Harding was indicted June 28 on one count of human trafficking conspiracy. She was released on \$35,000 bond.

Police transported the victim to a child advocacy center to connect her with appropriate housing and other services. Anyone with information about human trafficking in Howard County should call 410-313-STOP or email HCPDcrimetips@howardcountymd.gov.

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June 6, 2017

Two charged with human trafficking of a minor

16-year-old victim safe after being forced into prostitution

Howard County police have charged a man and a woman with human trafficking after an investigation revealed they were forcing a 16-year-old female into prostitution.

Andre Lamar Russell, 28, of Dulwick Court in Laurel, and Heather Lynn Harding, 23, of Woodbine Road in Woodbine, were charged with human trafficking of a minor. Russell is being held at the Howard County Detention Center without bond. Harding was released on \$35,000 bond.

Detectives received a tip May 31 that a man was offering sexual services with a teenage girl for money at motels in the Jessup area. Through investigation, they determined that Russell was the man described by the caller.

On the morning of June 1, officers observed Russell with an adult female, later identified as Harding, at a motel in the 7500 block of Assateague Drive in Jessup. Detectives responded and located a 16-year-old girl in their motel room. Russell and Harding were arrested.

Through investigation, detectives learned that Russell approached the teen, who had been previously reported as a runaway, and offered her a place to stay. He then sexually assaulted the girl and forced her to use drugs. Police believe Russell and Harding coordinated prostitution appointments and forced the teen to perform sex acts for money, which Russell would then take for himself. Detectives believe Russell placed ads on the website Backpage, which is known to be used for prostitution, advertising sexual services with the victim.

Police transported the victim to a child advocacy center to connect her with appropriate housing and other services. Detectives are continuing to investigate Russell and Harding to determine if they may be connected to additional victims.

Howard County is continuing its efforts to combat human trafficking through increases in funding, training and police resources. Investigators are focused on arresting traffickers and offering assistance to victims through housing, treatment, transportation and other help. Howard County detectives also monitor the website Backpage, and regularly place ads from the police, warning men not to engage in prostitution or human trafficking in Howard County.

Anyone with information about human trafficking in Howard County should call 410-313-STOP or email HCPDcrimetips@howardcountymd.gov.

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