



FORT LAUDERDALE POLICE DEPARTMENT NEWS RELEASE

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FLPD CREATES ENDANGERED PERSONS UNIT

UPDATE 8.16.23: It's been one year since the Fort Lauderdale Police Department created the Endangered Persons Unit (EPU) with a specific focus on handling the investigations involving our city's most vulnerable individuals.

In the first year, EPU initiated more than 1,100 investigations, which has resulted in approximately 50 arrests, and 572 missing persons recovered in good health. Several notable missing and endangered persons cases have involved adults and children with cognitive disabilities who were recovered swiftly and in good condition and a human trafficking investigation that resulted in a young victim being reunited with family. EPU is responsible for several significant arrests including individuals in possession of thousands of images and videos depicting child pornography and several severe animal abuses cases filed with the Broward County State Attorney's Office.

Detectives assigned to this unit continue to hone their skills and abilities to handle some of the most sensitive cases. Several members of the unit have been sworn into the U.S. Marshal's Florida/Caribbean Regional Fugitive Task Force to aide in the location and apprehension of non-compliant fugitive sex offenders and career criminals within our city. EPU has also partnered with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement's Child Abduction Response Team, South Florida Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Regional Task Force and the FBI's Human Trafficking Task Force. On average, the ICAC Task Force receives over 400 Cyber Tips and have conducted numerous online safety presentations to vulnerable youth and families within our city.

In the Spring of 2023, the Endangered Persons Unit, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the Florida Department of Probation Services conducted Operation Keeping Tabs III. The purpose of the operation was to ensure sexual predators in the city of Fort Lauderdale were complying with all applicable local and state laws. This operation was a success and led to 12 arrests, additional arrest warrants, and hundreds of address verifications.

Anyone with information regarding a crime in the City of Fort Lauderdale is encouraged to contact us, by calling 911 in an emergency or 954-764-HELP (4357) for non-emergency incidents. To report information related to an EPU investigation, contact Sergeant Margaret Dietrich at 954-828-6628.

ORIGINAL 9.8.22: The Fort Lauderdale Police Department is proud to announce the creation of the Endangered Persons Unit. This new unit will concentrate on investigating crimes and incidents involving our city's most vulnerable population, individuals often exploited because of their age, disability, or circumstance.



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The unit includes seven detectives and a sergeant, who were all previously assigned to various units within the Investigations Bureau. Collectively, the unit has considerable expertise in handling investigations involving missing persons, violent crimes against children, internet crimes against children, human trafficking, sexual offender verification violations, juvenile/career criminal offenders, and animal cruelty. These specialized investigations often overlap and merging them into one unit will allow for more collaboration on cases.

Detectives assigned to the unit will investigate missing persons cases involving missing adults and juveniles, habitual runaways, and endangered missing persons. In their investigations, they will continue to utilize the SafetyNet Tracking System, which is designed to assist in the quick recovery of enrolled users. Thus far, the SafetyNet program has a 100 percent recovery success rate for enrolled users.

Two detectives in the unit are task force officers specifically assigned to investigate internet crimes against children. Their responsibilities include thoroughly screening hundreds of cyber tips annually as well as handling reports of sextortion and other types of online exploitation.

Additional areas of focus include verifying registered sex offenders and career offenders residing within our jurisdiction and ensuring compliance with the terms of their registry. Furthermore, one detective in the unit specializes in following up on animal cruelty investigations.

The responsibilities of the sergeant of the unit include supervising the detectives and investigating cases of human trafficking and labor trafficking. The sergeant, who is also a task force officer, investigates trafficking cases on both a local and federal level.

The Endangered Persons Unit will further exemplify the mission of the Fort Lauderdale Police Department in providing a safe and orderly environment for the community we serve. To report a crime or information about a crime in the City of Fort Lauderdale, contact us at 954-764-HELP (4357). To report information related to the Endangered Persons Unit, contact Sergeant Margaret Dietrich at 954-828-6628.

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