



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **TRAFFICKING TASK FORCE CONDUCTS SEX, LABOR TRAFFICKING DETAILS AS PART OF STATEWIDE OPERATION**

For the third straight year as part of National Human Trafficking Awareness Month, the Tulare County Human Trafficking Task Force conducted sting operations and contacts in an effort to identify and rescue victims of human trafficking.

The operations were part of a statewide law enforcement human trafficking effort called Operation Reclaim and Rebuild coordinated by the Los Angeles Regional Human Trafficking Task Force.

“We will remain vigilant in pursuing human traffickers and predators who seek out our children for sexual exploitation,” Sheriff Mike Boudreaux said. “Safety for our children is an absolute must and priority each and every day.”

From January 17 to the early morning hours of January 18, Task Force members from the Tulare County Sheriff’s Office (TCSO) and the Tulare County District Attorney’s Office (TCDA) arrested four men for solicitation during an operation targeting sex trafficking in the Visalia area. Local nonprofit victim service provider Family Services of Tulare County (FSTC) was present to provide services to potential victims. The men arrested were Robert Oswalt (39), Roger Oxford (50), Jose Salas-Gonzalez (31), and Rene Ayala (48).

On January 30, in the first labor trafficking detail of its kind in Tulare County, Task Force members from the TCSO, TCDA, FSTC, and the Department of Homeland Security made contact with numerous roadside vendors operating in the north and south county.

Advocates from Family Services were able to provide resources and information to two individuals.

“Human trafficking victims are often hidden in plain sight. We want potential victims in our community to know that they have rights, they are not alone, and there is help available. It is crucial to help survivors develop safety plans in order to leave their situations and we appreciate the opportunity to work together to get that information out to those who may need it,” said Caity Meader, Chief Executive Officer for Family Services of Tulare County.

The Tulare County Human Trafficking Task Force was established in 2014 to bring law enforcement and community stakeholders together to identify victims of all forms of trafficking, deliver services to those victims, and lead to the successful investigation and prosecution of traffickers. In 2016, the Task Force began receiving funding from the United States Department of Justice to continue its mission of investigation, prosecution, victim service, and awareness. Funding was renewed in 2019 for a further three years. Since 2016, the Task Force has made 21 arrests and secured 14 convictions for trafficking while providing services to nearly 50 victims.

“Years ago, very few were talking about this crime or had a limited understanding of it. Today, because of the hard work of District Attorney staff in securing these grants and the collaborative efforts of law enforcement, victim services organizations, prosecutors, and the community as a whole, we are holding traffickers accountable and helping victims become survivors here in our county,” said Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward.

To learn more about the Task Force, visit [www.stoptraffickingtc.wordpress.com](http://www.stoptraffickingtc.wordpress.com).

*Media inquiries can be directed to the Tulare County Human Trafficking Task Force Coordinator and Assistant District Attorney Robert Dempsie (559) 636-5494*