

South Metro Exploitation Crimes Against Children Task Force

As part of this office's effort to educate and protect our youth, much like our Choose Not to Use initiative (choosenottouse.org), I am excited to announce the 1st task force in south metro Minnesota to combat sexual exploitation crimes against children! This is a joint effort led by the Scott County Attorney's Office and A.C.T. United (Anti Child Trafficking) Executive Director, Jessica Bartholomew.

This task force initiative was a long-standing goal for Jessica, since founding A.C.T. United in 2015. I started collaborating with Jessica several years ago by speaking on behalf of A.C.T. United at various community forums, and to civic and religious organizations. I have always had a great relationship with ACT United and have worked together on several crime prevention and community awareness initiatives in the past. The first in 2019, with a sold out, waiting list only, A.C.T. United conference, on the dangers of sexting and photo sharing, for parents and their teens. There was no pause on my behalf when approached by Jessica with the idea of a task force in the south metro to combat sexual exploitation crimes like sextortion targeting kids and teens.

The Need for a Task Force

Fast forward to 2024. In 2022 and 2023, the FBI, Homeland Security, and MN Department of Public Safety issued a crisis level warning of sextortion (online sexual exploitation) crimes targeting youth 9-17 years old, mostly boys. Of these cases, there were 22 confirmed deaths by suicide of teen victims, within one year, in the United States. The Minnesota BCA (state law enforcement agency) said they received over 9,000 reports of sextortion in 2023.

Sex trafficking of minors in Minnesota is impacting youth in all communities, of all ethnicities. In 2019, the MN Department of Health student survey found that over 5,000 teens sitting in our MN high school classrooms reported feeling forced to trade sex for a survival need like housing, food, etc. This meets the

and initiatives. Our first priority to combat the growing youth health and safety crisis of sextortion is prevention strategies that reach students, parents, and communities. We have to stop exploitation before it happens and provide safe exit, collaborative resources and justice for those already impacted. Our united goal is to stop the rise and work to end all forms of sexual exploitation crimes targeting children and teens.

If your community, school, organization or community event would like a presentation on this important topic, please reach out.

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United we win!