



DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

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U.S. Department of Justice Recognizes the Hawaii Attorney General's Missing Children Center Hawaii with the Child Protection Award on National Missing Children's Day

HONOLULU – As a part of its 38th annual commemoration of National Missing Children's Day today, the U.S. Department of Justice ("DOJ") honored Hawaii Department of the Attorney General's Missing Child Center Hawaii ("MCCH") Coordinator Amanda Leonard and Assistant Coordinator Kaleilani Grant with its Child Protection Award.

The DOJ website states, "In 1983, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed May 25 as National Missing Children's Day in memory of Etan Patz, a 6-year-old boy who disappeared from a New York City street corner on May 25, 1979. This day shines a spotlight on child safety and honors the professionals dedicated to protecting children around the country. Each year, the Department of Justice leads the nation in observing National Missing Children's Day." It also states, the National Child Protection Award "recognizes the extraordinary efforts of child protective service agency personnel, law enforcement officers or other professionals who have made a significant investigative or program contribution to protecting children from abuse or victimization."

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland selected Leonard and Grant for the award out of roughly two dozen nominations from around the country. Hawaii's MCCH nomination was submitted by Hawaii Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force Special Agent Alani Bankhead who, along with county, state and federal government and non-profit agencies, work collaboratively with the MCCH to locate, recover and protect missing children; promote community awareness about missing children; maintain a system to notify the public when a child is missing in Hawaii; and assist in the implementation of federal and state laws related to missing children. In October 2020, MCCH partnered with the Hawaii ICAC Task Force for its first "Operation Shine the Light," which centered on the recovery of endangered runaway youth from the foster care system. The multi-agency operation resulted in five children being recovered and garnered national attention.

“The Missing Child Center Hawaii earned this remarkable commendation through the dedicated efforts of Amanda and Kalei,” Attorney General Clare Connors said. “They are incredibly deserving of the DOJ Child Protection Award, and I am both proud of and inspired by their commitment to keeping Hawaii’s children safe.”

MCCH is a specialized criminal justice program in the Hawaii Department of the Attorney General’s Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division and operates as the State’s missing children clearinghouse and a resource for law enforcement, social services, and families. Between November 2019 and November 2020, MCCH assisted law enforcement in over 180 recoveries of missing children.

“We are deeply humbled and extremely honored and grateful to be recognized by the Justice Department and proudly share this award with our division and Department, as well as our law enforcement, victim services and community partners who work tirelessly to serve and protect missing and exploited children in our State. Receiving the DOJ Child Protection Award is the highest honor in our field and it has bolstered our morale and strengthened our commitment to the child protection mission during these challenging times,” said Leonard.

“It is a true honor to receive the national Child Protection Award. Without our local, state, federal agencies and community partners, this work would not be possible. As a survivor of sex trafficking, I am forever grateful and humbled beyond words to be able to serve our community in such an impactful way. Let us not forget the true heroes whom we dedicate this award; the many who have lost their lives due to domestic violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking. We will continue to shine the light on darkness until the life of the land is truly perpetuated in righteousness.” said Grant.

Although the in-person National Missing Children's Day ceremony in Washington, DC to honor the recipients was cancelled, a virtual commemoration website was created to honor the awardees: <https://oijdp.ojp.gov/events/missing-childrens-day/2021-national-missing-childrens-day-commemoration>

Anyone with information regarding missing children or the exploitation of children is encouraged to contact your local police department or the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST.

A copy of the DOJ release can be found [here](#).

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