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**FOURTEEN ENDANGERED MISSING CHILDREN SAFELY RECOVERED
ON O'AHU DURING MULTIAGENCY OPERATION
SHINE THE LIGHT VII**

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HONOLULU – The Hawai'i Department of the Attorney General, the Hawai'i Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Honolulu Police Department (HPD) announced the results of a multiagency child recovery operation conducted last week Thursday and Friday, known as Operation Shine the Light.

The state agencies and HPD worked jointly with the Department of Law Enforcement, FBI Honolulu, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Marshals Service, Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division, First Circuit Family Court, Department of the Prosecuting Attorney Honolulu County, Hale Kipa Trafficking Victim Assistance Program and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to locate, recover and provide emergency services to endangered missing children reported as "runaways" across O'ahu.

Operation Shine the Light VII resulted in the safe location and recovery of 14 minors between the ages of 13 and 17, including 9 females and 5 males, located separately across O‘ahu. This is the largest recovery effort in the operation’s history. Information reported by the public, including sightings and tips, contributed to the success of the operation. The recovered minors were assessed and screened for human trafficking and other forms of child abuse and exploitation. Investigations are ongoing and confidential.

“Endangered runaways are highly vulnerable and can experience homelessness, abuse and exploitation and accidents while they are missing. Operation Shine the Light aims to protect their safety and restore their childhood through collective action,” says Amanda Leonard, coordinator of the Missing Child Center-Hawai‘i and MAILE AMBER Alert Coordinator. “Online safety and real-world awareness should be practiced especially during summer months when children’s routines change and free time increases.”

“The Hawai‘i Department of the Attorney General’s Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force’s goal is to protect every child in Hawai‘i. Thanks to all our partners who are helping us achieve this goal,” said Ed Arias, commander of the department’s Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

“Operation Shine the Light reflects our unwavering commitment to protecting Hawai‘i’s youth. Fourteen at-risk teens were safely located this past weekend and each recovery represents a life given another chance at stability, support and hope,” said Department of Human Services Director Joseph Campos II. “We are grateful for the strong partnership between DHS, HPD and the Department of the Attorney General. This coordinated effort shows what can be achieved when we come together with a shared focus: ensuring the safety and well-being of our keiki.”

“Operation Shine the Light is an intelligence-driven effort focused on locating and protecting endangered youth who are most vulnerable to exploitation,” said Honolulu Police Department Interim Chief Rade Vanic. “The Honolulu Police Department is proud to work alongside the Department of the Attorney General, the Department of Human Services and our law enforcement and community partners to safely recover these children and help connect them with the care and support they need. Together, we remain committed to protecting Hawai‘i’s children and keeping our communities safe.”

“Assisting with Operation Shine the Light is a priority for the Hawaii Department of Law Enforcement. Helping to recover endangered youth is imperative,” said Jared Redulla, Deputy Director of Hawaii Department of Law Enforcement.

Honolulu Prosecuting Attorney Steve Alm said, “Every child deserves to be safe and every missing child deserves to be found. We are proud that members of our investigative team were able to assist in Operation Shine the Light and work alongside

our federal, state and local law enforcement partners to locate these vulnerable youth. Recovering children who may be at risk of exploitation or trafficking is one of the most important public safety missions we share — and we remain committed to protecting our community's most vulnerable victims.”

“Bringing at-risk teens home safely is one of the most important things we can do in law enforcement, as it represents futures restored,” said FBI Honolulu Special Agent in Charge David Porter. “This historic outcome is a direct testament to the relentless dedication of our agents and law enforcement partners who refuse to let our most vulnerable youth remain in the shadows. To anyone who seeks to exploit children: the FBI will never stop looking for them, and we will never stop coming for you.”

“The U.S. Secret Service is proud to stand alongside our law enforcement, public safety and community partners in this important operation to protect vulnerable youth,” said Glen Peterson, the special agent in charge of the U.S. Secret Service's Honolulu Field Office. “This year marked the highest recovery of runaway youth in the operation's history and is a testament to the dedication and teamwork of everyone involved. We remain steadfast in our mission to support these efforts and look forward to continuing our collaboration to ensure the safety and well-being of youth across the island.”

“Operation Shine the Light VII marks a decisive advance in our collective fight to identify, protect and support keiki at risk of trafficking, highlighted by the recovery of 14 at-risk missing teens across O'ahu last weekend — the highest recovery count in OSTL history. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our state and federal partners, Army CID remains unwavering in our duty to be the voice for those who cannot speak for themselves and the shield for those who cannot protect themselves,” said Special Agent in Charge Ruben Santiago, of the Department of the Army Criminal Investigation Division's Pacific Field Office. “Our commitment to safeguarding the vulnerable is relentless and we will continue driving into the darkest places to ensure every keiki in our community has the chance to grow up safe.”

“Operation Shine the Light represents the very best of what can be accomplished when state, local, and federal partners come together with a shared commitment to protect Hawai'i's keiki,” said Acting U.S. Marshal Justin Leong. “The U.S. Marshals Service is proud to stand alongside the Attorney General's Office and our partners to locate missing and endangered children, hold predators accountable, and create a safer future for all of Hawai'i's families.”

“Hale Kipa and the Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (TVAP) extend our sincere mahalo to the agencies, partners and victim advocates who made Operation Shine the Light VII possible. This coordinated recovery effort reflects a deep commitment to protecting the most vulnerable and targeted youth. As advocates who often know these

young people before they are located, we value being included in recovery operations and providing a trusted connection during a critical moment in their lives. It is difficult knowing what youth experience while missing from care or on runaway status, making these efforts all the more important. We are grateful for the collaboration, organization and dedication of everyone involved, including Hale Kipa advocates, whose collective work contributed to the largest recovery effort in Operation Shine the Light history,” said Victoria Roland, director of Youth Advocacy Services, Hale Kipa, Inc.

“We commend the agencies and professionals involved in the very successful Operation Shine the Light VII on O‘ahu, for their commitment to recovering missing children and protecting those most at risk,” said John Bischoff, who oversees NCMEC’s Missing Children Division. “Every child safely recovered is a reminder of why this important work matters. Now 14 at-risk missing teens are out of harm’s way.”

The Hawai‘i Department of the Attorney General’s Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and Missing Child Center-Hawai‘i originally initiated Operation Shine the Light in 2020 as a cooperative effort between county, state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations, centered on the recovery and protection of endangered missing foster youth who are at high risk of abuse, exploitation and trafficking.

Community members can help to combat child abuse/neglect and child trafficking by contacting the Hawai‘i Department of Human Services’ hotlines available 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- Child Abuse and/or Neglect: 808-832-5300 (O‘ahu)
- Child Abuse and/or Neglect: Toll-free 1-888-380-3088 (Hawai‘i Island, Maui, Moloka‘i, Lāna‘i, Kaua‘i)
- Child Trafficking: 808-832-1999 (O‘ahu)
- Child Trafficking: Toll-free 1-888-398-1188 (Hawai‘i Island, Maui, Moloka‘i, Lāna‘i, Kaua‘i)

NCMEC offers two free child safety education resources available online:

- NetSmartz: <https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/home>
- KidSmartz: <https://www.missingkids.org/education/kidsmartz>

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 and Exploited Children at 1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678).

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