



\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\*

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**Operation Human Freight Identifies Multiple Victims of Prostitution**

**Pierce County** – Washington State Patrol (WSP) and Lakewood Police detectives arrested nearly a dozen people during an overnight operation dubbed “Operation Human Freight.” The nighttime law enforcement operation used undercover detectives to try and rescue people caught up in human trafficking and prostitution.

“It’s about ending the cycle of human trafficking,” says WSP Chief John R. Batiste. “This operation not only helps protect the victims of human trafficking but also safeguards our communities from criminal activity.”

On the evening of February 28, 2018, detectives set up a base at a truck stop in the northern section of Pierce County near the I-5 corridor. Officers were searching for both suspects promoting prostitution and victims of human trafficking. Within four hours, officers found seven women who were victims of prostitution and three others who were victims of human trafficking.

The operation was initiated after multiple citizens complained to the WSP and Lakewood Police regarding prostitution near Pierce County truck stops. Undercover detectives made contact with the suspected prostitutes both through internet sites and in-person.

The goal of the operation was to rescue young girls caught up in the vicious cycle of prostitution and human trafficking. Advocates from Kitsap County and the City of Seattle were on-scene to provide food, water, services, and contact information for all the victims. Additionally, on site was a survivor of prostitution who spoke to the young women and acted as a resource for their needs.

“We want to provide these young women with a way out,” says WSP Lieutenant James Mjor.” Many of these women are out on the streets soliciting sex because they feel it’s their only option.”

In less than 4 hours, detectives booked individuals for the following crimes:

- Promoting prostitution 2<sup>nd</sup> degree
- Felony escape DOC warrant
- Uniform possession of a controlled substance (UPCS)
- Suspected of loitering
- Promoting prostitution 2<sup>nd</sup> degree

- Driving with License Suspended 1<sup>st</sup> degree warrant
- DUI warrant
- Active DOC/violent offender
- Possession with intent to sale
- Soliciting prostitution

The operation was the first of its kind in this state. It involved a collaboration effort between multiple agencies including:

- The Lakewood Police Department
- Fife Police Department
- Seattle Police Department
- West Sound Narcotics Task Force
- Naval Criminal Investigative Service

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