



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT OBSERVES NATIONAL MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY

Department Honors Law Enforcement Officers, Firefighters, for Efforts to Rescue Missing and Exploited Children; Poster Contest Winner Announced

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today recognized 17 law enforcement officers from California, Florida, and Texas, as well as two firefighters from Tennessee, for their efforts to find missing children and bring child sexual predators and child pornographers to justice.

Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General Ed O'Callaghan, Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Matt Dummermuth, and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Administrator Caren Harp presented the awards during the Department's National Missing Children's Day ceremony.

"Those recognized today epitomize the dedication of law enforcement officers, investigative officials, and private citizens who make a difference in the lives of children every day," said Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General Ed O'Callaghan. "Their vigilant and selfless actions remind us of our responsibility to protect children and bring to justice those who attempt to exploit them. The Department of Justice is proud to honor these champions of justice and public safety."

The ceremony, hosted by OJJDP, included recognition of Madison Dozier, a fifth grader at Reiley Elementary School in Alexandria, Kentucky, this year's National Missing Children's Day poster contest winner.

The following awards were presented:

Attorney General's Special Commendation: This commendation recognizes the extraordinary efforts and significant investigative or program contributions of an Internet Crimes Against Children task force or affiliate agency, or an individual assigned to either.

Recipient: Detective Lorraine Szczepanik of the Broward County Sheriff's Office and South Florida Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, whose timely investigation into a person suspected of viewing and sharing child pornography online led to the discovery of thousands of images and videos of child victims, as well as online conversations that led to the identification of three additional child pornographers.

Missing Children’s Law Enforcement Award: This award recognizes the extraordinary efforts of law enforcement officers who made a significant investigative or program contribution to the safety of children.

Recipients: Six members of the Round Rock, Texas, Police Department; three special agents from the San Antonio FBI Field Office (Austin and Laredo Resident Agencies); and a Texas Ranger from Austin collaboratively investigated and tracked down a suspect who kidnapped two missing sisters, ages 7 and 14, from their home in Round Rock. The sisters were found unharmed 700 miles away when the suspect was pulled over following issuance of an AMBER Alert and other alerts in Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado.

Missing Children’s Child Protection Award: This award honors the extraordinary efforts of law enforcement officers who made a significant investigative or program contribution on behalf of missing, abused, or victimized children.

Recipients: Detective Christie Hirota and five other members of the Sacramento Valley, California, High Tech Crimes Task Force led an investigation that resulted in the arrest, just 48 hours after receipt of the initial report, of a foster parent who abused his foster children and produced child pornography.

Missing Children’s Citizen Award: This award honors the extraordinary efforts of private citizens for their unselfish acts to recover missing or abducted children safely.

Recipients: Firefighters Aaron Woods and Michael Webb of the Blount County, Tennessee, Fire Department led a seven-hour portion of a 22-hour search across 2,000 acres of rugged, wooded terrain—on foot and by air—to find a six-year-old boy and his dog less than 24 hours after they were reported missing.

Other speakers at the ceremony included John F. Clark, president and chief executive officer of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and Yvonne Ambrose, founder of the Desiree Foundation Against Sex Trafficking.

President Ronald Reagan proclaimed May 25, 1983, the first National Missing Children’s Day in memory of Etan Patz, a six-year-old boy who disappeared from a New York City street corner on May 25, 1979. Missing Children’s Day honors his memory and the memories of children still missing. Although Etan’s killer was convicted in February 2017 for the 1979 murder, Etan’s case remains active with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children because his body was never found.

In 2018, there were 424,066 missing children entries in the FBI’s National Crime Information Center. Additional information about [National Missing Children’s Day](#) is available online.

The Office of Justice Programs, directed by Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Matt M. Dummermuth, provides federal leadership, grants and resources to improve the nation’s capacity to prevent and reduce crime, assist victims and enhance the rule of law by strengthening the criminal justice system. More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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