



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

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### **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RECOGNIZES HAWAII MISSING CHILDREN COORDINATORS WITH CHILD PROTECTION AWARD**

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today honored two coordinators from the Department of the Attorney General’s Missing Child Center-Hawaii for their involvement in the recovery of 180 missing children in Hawaii between November 2019 and November 2020. Before the formation of this team, only nine missing children were recovered in 2018.

Program Coordinator Amanda Leonard and Assistant Coordinator Kaleilani Grant were awarded the Missing Children’s Child Protection Award, which was announced as part of the 38<sup>th</sup> annual commemoration of National Missing Children’s Day. This 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.

“It is remarkable to see the progress Hawaii has made in securing the safety of its children, thanks to the tireless work of these two exceptional professionals and the impressive team they lead,” said Amy Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department’s Office of Justice Programs. “Ms. Leonard and Ms. Grant, and the staff of Missing Child Center-Hawaii, have given hope to all children who go missing in Hawaii. We are impressed by their achievements and deeply grateful for their service.”

Ms. Leonard and Ms. Grant were instrumental in implementing Operation Shine the Light, a cooperative effort between Missing Child Center-Hawaii; federal, state and local law enforcement agencies; and four nonprofit organizations. Among the 180 children recovered in the 12 months ending in November 2020, five were runaway foster youth between the ages of 16 and 17 who were recovered by the task force over two days in October 2020. When discovered, one of the teens was suffering from an overdose and another, a ward of the state, had been missing from Guam for more than 10 months. Three of the teens were trafficking victims. Child endangerment, custodial interference and trafficking investigations are ongoing.

“The citizens of Hawaii have benefitted greatly from the dedicated work of Ms. Leonard and Ms. Grant,” said Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Acting Administrator Chyrl Jones. “We congratulate them for their commitment to improving relationships between Hawaii’s child protection professionals in order to better identify, recover and pursue justice for missing and exploited children.”

The Department also recognized one sergeant and four detectives from Fresno, California, a sergeant from Addison, Illinois, and a United States Postal Service employee from Columbia, Maryland, for their efforts to bring missing children home. The Department declared Heidy Jimena Perez Veleta from Sunnyside Elementary School in Dodge City, Kansas, winner of the 2021 National Missing Children’s Day poster contest.

Every year on May 25, the Office of Justice Programs and its Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention lead the nation in observing National Missing Children's Day, first proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan in 1983. This day shines a spotlight on child safety and honors the professionals dedicated to protecting children around the country.

In lieu of an in-person ceremony, OJJDP is launching a [website](#) today featuring information about the awardees and statements from Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, Office of Justice Programs Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Solomon, OJJDP Acting Administrator Jones and President and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children John F. Clark.

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The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at [www.ojp.gov](http://www.ojp.gov).

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