



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

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### **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RECOGNIZES MEMBERS OF FRESNO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE WITH THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S SPECIAL COMMENDATION**

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today recognized four detectives and one sergeant of the Fresno County Sheriff's Office's Central California Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force for their investigation that resulted in the arrest of 34 sexual predators.

The detectives received the Attorney General's Special Commendation, 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 an ICAC task force, an affiliate agency or an individual assigned to either, for making a significant investigative or program contribution to the ICAC task force program.

“These five highly skilled and resourceful officers uncovered a well-organized and very disturbing scheme to exploit and harm children in the midst of a pandemic when young people were especially vulnerable to online predators,” said Amy Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Department's Office of Justice Programs. “We have these brave professionals to thank for preventing scores of people from carrying out their plans, bringing them to justice, and protecting our youth.”

The officers recognized are Sergeant Chad Stokes, Detective Cassandra Stevens, Detective Scott Schwamb, Detective Randall Heckman and Detective Steven Souphasith. They are members of Operation COVID Chatdown, a joint effort of the Central California ICAC Task Force and Homeland Security Investigations in Fresno, which targeted people who sought to take advantage of children's increased presence online during the pandemic.

From July 20 to August 2, 2020, this team of agents and detectives, posing as minors, communicated with more than 190 suspects on multiple online platforms. The predators sent child pornography and sexually explicit content to the undercover officers and some arranged in-person meetings with them. The 34 suspects were arrested when they arrived for what they believed would be sexual encounters with the children. The team located additional young victims when search warrants were issued after the arrests.

“It is vital that we alert the public about technology-facilitated crimes against children and educate people about how to protect children online,” said Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Acting Administrator Chyrl Jones. “We are very grateful for the dedication of the Central California ICAC Task Force and their hard work in uncovering these sexual predators.”

The Department also recognized a United States Postal Service employee from Columbia, Maryland, a sergeant from Addison, Illinois, and two coordinators of the Department of the

Attorney General's Missing Child Center-Hawaii 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 Garland, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, OJP 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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