



NAPA COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

1127 First Street, Suite C
Napa, CA 94559

Main: (707) 253-4211
Fax: (707) 253-4041
www.countyofnapa.org/da

ALLISON HALEY
District Attorney

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PRESS RELEASE

AMERICAN CANYON COUPLE SENTENCED TO STATE PRISON FOR PANDERING A MINOR

Napa County District Attorney Allison Haley has announced the sentences of Brandon Barrett (age 27) and Tauzhanae Dowell (age 26). Mr. Barrett pled no contest to Pandering a Minor, Assault with a Deadly Weapon, Felon in Possession of a Firearm, and Resisting Arrest. On Tuesday, March 8th, Judge Elia Ortiz sentenced Mr. Barrett to 16 years and 4 months in state prison.

Ms. Dowell pled no contest to Pandering a Minor, Identity Theft, and False Personation. Judge Ortiz sentenced Ms. Dowell to 7 years and 4 months in state prison. Both defendants are required to register as sex offenders upon their release.

During October of 2018, a detective with the Napa Special Investigations Bureau (NSIB) became aware of potential human trafficking in Napa County. After further investigation, the detective identified a minor victim who was lured to California from Georgia to work for Mr. Barrett and Ms. Dowell as a commercial sex worker. The defendants, who operated out of their home in American Canyon, recruited the minor victim and other adult females to participate in sex work throughout Northern California.

The Napa County District Attorney's Office took the lead in prosecution, with the cooperation of District Attorneys in Alameda, Sacramento, San Francisco, and San Mateo who ceded jurisdiction.

Deputy District Attorney Stephanie Macumber said, "Under California law, the crime of 'pandering a minor' is the manipulative and cruel practice of influencing a child to become a commercial sex worker by way of threats, violence, or promises. These criminals recruited a vulnerable child with false promises of affection and future wealth. They asserted their dominance with the use of violence. These sentences reflect the coordination of multiple law enforcement agencies under the excellent leadership of the Napa Special Investigations Bureau."

The survivor, now an adult, demonstrated incredible resilience and perseverance throughout the prosecution and bravely testified in court against her perpetrators. At the conclusion of the case, the survivor told the court that although she has emotional scars from the experience, she managed to achieve several of her goals. She has earned an AA degree and reunified with her young child since returning home to Georgia.

This was an extensive and complex investigation involving a sophisticated illegal prostitution ring with several victims that operated throughout Northern California. The investigation involved coordination between multiple law enforcement agencies, including the Napa County Sheriff's Office, American Canyon Police Department, San Francisco Police Department, Oakland Police Department, Sacramento Police Department, Contra Costa County District Attorney's Office, and law enforcement in the state of Wisconsin. NSIB Detective Ken Van Dyke spearheaded the investigation and was instrumental in bringing the defendants to justice.

Any questions regarding this case may be directed to Assistant Deputy District Attorney Paul Gero.