Children tortured and abused in sex trafficking ring in Alabama, police say

At least 10 children, ages 3 to 15, were sexually abused in an underground bunker in Brent, Alabama, Bibb County Sheriff Jody Wade said.

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By Vivian Ho and Angie Orellana Hernandez

At least 10 children between the ages of 3 and 15 were held in an underground bunker in central Alabama and sexually exploited, tortured and trafficked, according to the local sheriff's department.

Authorities have arrested seven individuals — including the parents and family members of the some of the victims — on several charges ranging from human trafficking, rape, sodomy, sexual torture and bestiality, Bibb County Sheriff Jody Wade said at a news conference Wednesday.

"We anticipate more arrests, and unfortunately, more victims," Wade said, adding that both male and female children were among the victims, and that it appeared the abuse began in 2022.

Criminal complaints filed by prosecutors and obtained by The Washington Post describe horrific conditions in which the young children were allegedly kept and say children were sold to people who sexually abused them.

Police said the abuse took place at an underground bunker located in Brent, Alabama, a small city with a population of about 4,000 located about 40 miles south of Birmingham. Wade said he believed the bunker had been built as a storm shelter, and then "used for a horrible thing."

Sometimes the children would be "tied to a pole" or "bound to a bed" in the bunker, Wade said, adding that "I understand that sometimes [the traffickers] could make up to $1,000 a night" by allowing people to abuse the children.

The 4th Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office announced earlier this week that multiple individuals were being prosecuted in the case. William Chase McElroy and Dalton Terrell, both 21, are accused of multiple counts of rape, human trafficking and sodomy. Andres Velazquez-Trejo, 29, is accused of six counts of human trafficking. Velazquez-Trejo also allegedly sold pornographic images of the children, a criminal complaint alleged.

All three men were arrested in April. Wade announced Wednesday that four more individuals had been arrested, though court records weren't immediately available.

"I've been in law enforcement for 33 years, and this is absolutely the most horrible thing I've ever seen when it comes to the victimization of children," Wade said. "I know God's forgiveness is boundless, but if there was a limit to it, I think we've reached it."

It was not clear if the accused had attorneys, and the public defender's office could not be reached Friday.

The investigation began in February after the state Department of Human Services alerted the sheriff's office of the possible sexual abuse of children, Wade said. Two of the victims had been found performing sex acts on each other and told investigators that McElroy had taught them how to perform these acts and had done them to them as well, Bibb County Assistant District Attorney Bryan Jones told AL.com.

The sheriff's office waited to announce the arrests and charges until investigators could ensure that all the victims were safe, Wade said. They are now in the custody of the state Department of Human Services and are receiving counseling and medical attention, he said.

"No child deserves this — that's the most horrible thing you can do, the power and control of it, the stealing the innocence of a child and the horrible victimization they went through with these monsters," Wade said.

He added that he hoped that the younger victims would only have a "blurry memory" of what they experienced.

"Some of the older children ... they'll carry this vividly for the rest of their lives," Wade said. "You can't heal from this but you can move on as best you can."

Aaron Schaffer contributed to this report.

What readers are saying

The comments on the article highlight the role of family members in the abuse and trafficking of children, expressing outrage and disbelief that such acts could occur within