

9 arrested during undercover investigation targeting central Pa. child predators

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A three-day undercover investigation dubbed “Operation Wrong Place” that targeted online child predators led to nine arrests, Dauphin County officials announced on Wednesday. From May 15 to 17, Pennsylvania State Police, along with Dauphin County detectives and Derry Township police, used social media to identify people who use the internet to exploit children sexually.

Dauphin County District Attorney Fran Chardo said the operation was a “great success,” resulting in charges including unlawful contact with a minor, criminal use of a communication facility, trafficking, and related offenses.

There are also multiple ongoing investigations, Chardo said.

Arrests were made across central Pennsylvania, including two in Harrisburg, two in Lykens, and one each in Lebanon, Dillsburg, Hummelstown and Fredericksburg. One person from Waldorf, Maryland, was also arrested. Authorities said investigators posed as minors online to communicate with people looking for children. Once the suspects arranged an in-person meeting, troopers intervened and arrested them.

State police said the following people were charged:

- Andrew Smeltz, 54, of Lykens
- Juan Martinez, 36, of Lykens
- Phillip Beamesderfer, 39, of Fredericksburg
- Louis Rodriguez-Aldaz, 48, of Hummelstown
- Aaron Flemming, 48, of Dillsburg
- Kevin Appleby, 53, of Harrisburg
- Kenneth L. Bretz, 73, of Harrisburg
- Jonathan Behney, 64, of Lebanon
- Marvin Flores-Juarez, 33, of Waldorf, Maryland

“Anytime that anybody’s preying on children, it’s certainly a concern of ours,” said state police Major Mark Magyar. “So the fact that we’re able to stop something before it happens to a real victim, it certainly has success in our eyes.”

Child sexual exploitation is both widespread and growing, with tens of millions of suspected incidents reported each year nationwide, according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. In Pennsylvania, more than 32,000 people were charged across the state with child abuse cases from 2019 to 2023, resulting in 10,915 convictions, according to state judicial records.