

# US Marshals Help Rescue 122 Missing Children Calling It 'Largest Rescue Mission in History'

More than 120 missing children have been rescued in Florida in a two-week operation that the state's attorney general is calling the "largest child rescue mission in history."

U.S. Marshals announced earlier this week that a task force comprised of local, state, and federal law enforcement groups located and recovered 122 missing and endangered Florida children.

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The two-week operation, named "Home for the Holidays," saw children rescued from Central Florida and metro areas, including 57 children rescued in the Tampa Bay area, 14 rescued in Orlando, 22 rescued in Jacksonville, and 29 rescued in Fort Myers. The effort also rescued children in nine other states.

Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier said the rescue efforts were "one of the single largest child-rescue operations in U.S. history," and tops the scale and success of Operation Dragon Eye, which was conducted earlier this year and saw 60 critically missing children rescued.

"These kids, ranging in age from 17 down to just 2 years old, many have been through the unthinkable," he said during a press conference. "They've been trafficked. They've been exploited. They've been abused."

He added, "This operation highlights the strength and diligence of Florida's Law Enforcement. I am deeply grateful for everyone that made Operation Home for the Holidays a massive success. Many of these kids have been victimized in unspeakable ways. We will prosecute their abusers to the fullest extent of the law."

"Child predators, stay out of Florida, you are not welcome here," Uthmeier said.

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United States Marshal for the Middle District of Florida Bill Berger said the FBI, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), and 11 sheriff's offices were all involved. He explained to reporters on Monday that finding, identifying, and recovering the children is no easy task.

"What allows our Middle Florida-based child recovery initiatives to stand out is the emphasis placed on what happens after. We know these children will have needs once we find them. It only makes sense to build these operations alongside like-minded partners from across the child welfare space," Berger said.

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According to a press release from the FDLE office, many of the children experienced various levels of abuse, neglect, exploitation, or exposure to other criminal activity.

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