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## 4 charged with running foster child prostitution ring

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Willie Calvin Bivens

Police and prosecutors arrested four alleged pimps Monday morning as part of an ongoing investigation into a ring of human traffickers who preyed on abused and neglected children in foster care.

The men, police say, were part of an organized conspiracy to lure underage girls into prostitution. The four were charged with conspiracy, racketeering and unlawful sexual activity with a minor.

Using a teenage foster child as a recruiter, police say, the four men plied underage girls with cash, affection and gifts. Ultimately, the girls became prostitutes who earned the ring about \$100 for every man with whom they had sex. The girls, in turn, were paid \$30 or \$40 of that original \$100.

Beginning in January of 2011, members of the ring would call girls on cell phones supplied by the men and arrange for them to have sex at a building in Homestead that the ring used as a kind of brothel, records say.

Charged Monday were Eric George Earle, 29, called “E-Nasty,” Willie Calvin Bivens, 65, called “Tank,” Anturrell Nathaniel Dean, 30, and David Zarifi, 34. A fifth person — a 17-year-old foster child who is identified only by the initials S.S. — is listed in a 13-page sworn statement as a “recruiter” for the ring, though she is not charged with any crimes. As of late Monday, the four men remained in jail: Zarifi on \$53,000 bail, Earle on \$60,000 bail, Bivens on \$35,505 bail, and Dean on \$45,000.

The human trafficking investigation also involves a now-suspended child abuse investigator for the agency that oversees child welfare efforts in Florida. Jean LaCroix, a child protective investigator employed by the Department of Children & Families, was placed on paid administrative leave while police and prosecutors investigate allegations he repeatedly had sex with a teenaged foster child whose safety he was assigned to protect.

Sources have told The Miami Herald that LaCroix placed the girl at a group home for dependent children — and then returned to the home repeatedly to pick the girl up for sexual favors. The girl, sources say, also was working for members of the ring who were arrested Monday.

LaCroix had spearheaded a 2006 child abuse investigation — prompted by a call from worried teachers and administrators — into the welfare of Nubia Barahona, a twin who was adopted from foster care and was killed in 2011, police say by her own adoptive parents, Carmen and Jorge Barahona. LaCroix was named in a lawsuit alleging DCF failed repeatedly to protect Nubia, and her brother, Victor, whom police say also endured years of torment.

LaCroix has not been charged with any crimes.

The investigation began in December 2011 when a foster child disclosed that she had been having consensual sex with a man.

The 17-year-old, identified as M.D., allowed police to search her cellphone. It contained images of the girl both naked and having sex with Zarifi, a sworn statement says. M.D., police say, suffers from cognitive impairments.

M.D. told police that, soon after she was sent to live in a state-operated group home in September 2011, she was recruited by a housemate, S.S., who told her “she could make money by having sex with men,” a warrant states. At first, she was introduced to a man she then knew only as “E-Nasty.” But Earle introduced her to Zarifi, whom she told police was “nice to her.” M.D. liked Zarifi so much that she had sex with him for free after being paid four times.

Eventually, M.D. agreed to have sex with other men, the warrant says. Either Earle or Zarifi would call her on her cellphone, and arrange to pick her up either at school or at her group home. From there, M.D. would be driven to a home operated by Bivens, where she would be paid \$40 to have sex with men, the warrant says.

M.D. also had sex with Zarifi in a room at Bivens’ house, the warrant says.

A review of text messages on M.D.’s phone by police recovered several messages from Earle involving johns, including a message that “somebody wanna pay u to [have sex].”

Another resident of the group home, which was operated by Children’s Home Society, told police that she, too, had been recruited into prostitution by S.S. and Earle. The girl, identified only as C.W., said that Earle gave her clothes — at first without asking for sex in return. Later, C.W. had sex with Earle, who then coaxed her into having sex with Bivens, as well, “as a kind of trial run,” the warrant states.

Shortly after that, police say, Earle asked C.W. to meet with his brother, Dean, who had recently been released from jail. Dean gave the girl cash without requiring that she have sex, the warrant says. But by March 2011, C.W. was prostituting herself for Dean. The arrangement lasted until the following August, the warrant says, and then briefly a month later. C.W. told police that Dean charged johns \$100 to have sex with the girl. He paid her \$30.

Another foster child who lived at the group home, identified as J.D., told police that Earle tried to

recruit her, as well, to work for him as a prostitute. "She states that 'E' knew that they were minors at the time he recruited them," the warrant says.

Though child welfare administrators typically try to place foster children in homes with foster parents, some children prove to be more challenging. Older children with developmental disabilities, mental illness or behavioral problems end up in group homes, rather than with foster families, because it's hard to find families willing to take them.

The ease with which ring members had access to the girls showed the "extreme lack of supervision of these girls, said Carole Schaffer, a children's advocate who is working with DCF to recruit foster parents and improve the quality of foster parenting. "Nobody is looking at them as a parent would," Schaffer said.

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