



Governor's Office for
Children and Families

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Uniting and Empowering Communities so they can Unite and Empower Families

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Pioneering Sex Trafficking Assessment Team to Support
Victims of Child Prostitution in Georgia!**

ATLANTA, GEORGIA (January 25, 2010) – *Each month, over 400 girls are commercially sexually exploited in Georgia, and the average age of entry into prostitution or the commercial sex market for girls is between 12 and 14 years old.* Recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation named Atlanta as one of 14 cities in the nation with the **highest incidence** of children used in prostitution. Recognizing child prostitution as a serious problem in Georgia, the Governor's Office for Children and Families (GOCF) created the nation's first statewide response to address the needs of child sex trafficking victims. One of the first milestones for this state initiative was the establishment of the Georgia Care Connection Office, designed to connect victims to essential services and support. ***The second pioneering accomplishment is the creation of the Sandy Springs Sex Trafficking Assessment Team (STAT).*** "This is the nation's first law enforcement, state government and children's hospital partnership to provide expert victim advocate support, forensic interview services and comprehensive medical evaluations for victims (girls and boys) of sex trafficking," stated Jen Bennecke, Executive Director of Governor's Office for Children and Families.

As soon as police officers or detectives of the Sandy Springs Police Department identify a child who they suspect to be a victim of sex trafficking, they will engage the victim advocate; take the child to the Child Protection Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta for a forensic interview and medical exam; and simultaneously refer the child to the Georgia Care Connection Office for treatment services. The Sandy Springs Victim Advocate will stay engaged with the child and their family as the investigation proceeds to bring the trafficker to justice. No other comprehensive support system exists in this county for victims of sex trafficking.

It is no longer a secret that the sex trafficking of children is occurring in our state and local communities. Sandy Springs Police Department currently has several open cases of child sexual exploitation. The impact on the victim is devastating. "The Sandy Springs Police Department is

committed to reducing victimization particularly when the sexual exploitation of our youth is involved. Through this unique collaborative partnership we will identify sexually exploited youth and help begin the healing process while aggressively bringing those responsible to justice,” stated Chief Sult.

GOCF is excited about this latest collaborative effort in furthering the initiative to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Georgia. As the facilitator of the statewide response, GOCF believes that the Sandy Springs Sex Trafficking Assessment Team is another landmark action to form public and private partnerships to address the needs of these victims, and vital community partners are needed to sustain these children throughout the recovery process. ***For additional information about the Sandy Springs Sex Trafficking Assessment Team, contact Detective Jeffrey Thomas (Jeffrey.Thomas@sandyspringsga.org).***

*The mission of the Governor’s Office for Children and Families (GOCF) is to empower Georgia communities to achieve improved and sustainable outcomes by working in a system of care framework, which will ensure that all children and families are **Educated, Healthy, Safe and Growing.***

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