



AG Attorney General

AG Nessel Announces Labor Trafficking Charges in Three Rivers

April 30, 2024

Media Contact:

Danny Wimmer

Press Secretary

agpress@michigan.gov

LANSING – Today at a press conference at the YWCA Kalamazoo, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, alongside members of the Department of Attorney General, representatives of the Three Rivers Police Department, and officials from the federal Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), announced charges against three individuals alleged to have **labor trafficked** a now 33-year-old woman brought to the United States from India under the auspices of marriage.

Ikbahl Singh Machhal, age 40, Kartar Chand, 67, and Shila Devi, 66, all of Three Rivers, were each charged with one count of Human Trafficking – Forced Labor and one count of Human Trafficking Enterprise. Each count is a 10-year felony.

“**Labor trafficking** is a hidden crime that often goes undetected,” Nessel said. “This woman’s existence was reduced entirely to service toward this business, and she suffered greatly throughout her years in Michigan and at the Broadway Market. I am grateful for the collaboration between the Three Rivers Police Department, Homeland Security Investigations, YWCA Kalamazoo, and the prosecutors in my office for bringing such horrible acts to light, pursuing justice for this victim, and the roles they each played in liberating her from her own family.”

The defendants allegedly began trafficking the victim in 2012 when the family forcibly moved her from Pennsylvania to Michigan when her husband, Machhal, and in-laws, Chand and Devi, came to own the Broadway Market in Three Rivers. Shortly after arriving in Michigan, the victim began working at the convenience store, allegedly never receiving payment for her labor. The defendants are accused of requiring the victim to work 8 to 9 hours a day, 7 days a week, against her will and under threat of severe physical, mental, and emotional abuse. The Department alleges this continued for approximately 8 years until the victim was able to leave her home with the assistance of the YWCA Kalamazoo and local law enforcement in October 2020 following domestic violence charges against her husband.

"This case highlights the fact that forced labor is an issue that can affect any community and we must all remain vigilant," said HSI Detroit acting Special Agent in Charge Shawn Gibson. "I want to commend the victim in this case for their bravery in coming forward and all the law enforcement professionals and community partners who pursued justice."

Three Rivers Police Officer Matt Kilbourn uncovered the scheme after he identified signs of **labor trafficking** during a hospital visit with the victim after suspected domestic violence. Due to Officer Kilbourn's vigilance and dedication, this victim was able to leave her abusers.

Through the tireless work of the YWCA Kalamazoo, the victim was able to reclaim her life and take back her control. The YWCA Kalamazoo provides numerous invaluable services to victims of human trafficking, including legal assistance and support. As a result of the persistence of the YWCA Kalamazoo and their collaboration with the Department of Homeland Security Investigations and the Department of Attorney General, charges against these traffickers were able to be brought.

"There is a community here at YWCA Kalamazoo and beyond to support **labor trafficking** survivors, on survivors' terms," said Susan Rosas, CEO of YWCA Kalamazoo. "A just movement requires community partnership from YWCA's advocacy, housing, legal services, and therapy teams, law enforcement, and a network of dedicated service providers. For survivors who wish to seek justice, this landmark case sends a loud message that justice is indeed possible in Michigan."

Human trafficking is found in many different labor markets that consumers might not suspect, such as convenience stores, nail salons, massage parlors, farming and agriculture, and restaurants. Those being trafficked often do not even realize they are in fact victims of human trafficking or are not aware of how to get help.

“Human trafficking is prevalent throughout the State of Michigan and often hides in places one would not expect,” said Assistant Attorney General Melissa Palepu, chair of the Michigan Human Trafficking Commission. “All too often vulnerable individuals are trafficked by those close to them, such as family and friends and their abuse is often hidden in plain sight. This is especially true when it comes to **labor trafficking**.”

Machhal and Devi were arraigned in the 3B District Court in St. Joseph County following their arrest by law enforcement officers from Three Rivers Police Department and Homeland Security Investigations on April 29th. They were each granted bond in the amount of \$1 million and, should they make bond, their passports will be confiscated by the Court. Chand has been charged but not arrested, having fled to India.

They will next appear in the 3B District Court on May 14th at 8:30 am for a probable cause conference.

Victims of human trafficking or those who have identified someone they think may need help can contact the [National Human Trafficking Resource Center](#) at 888-373-7888 or text 233733. This is a national, toll-free hotline, that is available to answer calls, texts, and chats from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year. All calls are confidential.

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Please note: For all criminal proceedings, a criminal charge is merely an allegation. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. The Department does not provide booking photos.

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