

Connecticut woman pleads guilty for role in human trafficking ring

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Shanaya S. Hicks of Hartford, Conn., pleaded guilty today to five counts related to her role in a sex-trafficking ring that involved minors. Hicks is the eighth of ten defendants to plead guilty to federal charges in this case. On August 8, 2006, Hicks, along with nine other co-defendants, was charged in a 64-count superseding indictment. Hicks, and two additional co-defendants were also charged with the sex trafficking of minors and sex trafficking by force, fraud and coercion. Specifically, Hicks has pleaded guilty today to two counts of sex trafficking of minors; two counts of sex trafficking adult women through force, fraud or coercion; and conspiracy to use interstate facilities to promote prostitution. In her plea agreement, Hicks has admitted to causing two juveniles to engage in prostitution and causing two adults to be held in prostitution through fraud and coercion. Hicks, 24, who is also known as "Toni", waived her right to jury trial in open court before U.S. District Court Judge Christopher Droney. She faces a maximum penalty of up to life in prison and a fine of up to \$1.25 million. "Sex trafficking is an abhorrent crime that too often occurs in our own backyards, and too often victimizes children," said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "It is a top priority of the Justice Department to root out and prosecute those who so ruthlessly victimize others." "The charges to which this defendant admitted her guilt clearly show that prostitution is not a victimless crime," said, Kevin J. O'Connor, U.S. Attorney for the District of Connecticut. "The federal government is committed to prosecuting sex trafficking crimes, particularly when minors are abused and women are forced to commit sexual acts against their will and under the threat of violence." Human trafficking prosecutions are a top priority of the Department. In the last six fiscal years, the Civil Rights Division, in conjunction with U.S. Attorneys' Offices, has increased by six-fold the number of human trafficking cases filed in court. In 2006, the Department obtained a record number of convictions in human trafficking prosecutions. The case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Hartford and Windsor Police Departments, and the Internal Revenue Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Genco and Andrew J. Kline of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.

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