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Homeland Security: Juveniles rescued from human trafficking, immigration arrests made at SC restaurant

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[Stephanie Moore](#) ✉

Digital Content Manager

Rey Llerena

Miya Payton

Anchor/Reporter

WEST UNION, S.C. — Homeland Security released information Friday about a human trafficking and immigration investigation at a West Union, South Carolina, restaurant on Wednesday.

Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin released this statement to WYFF News 4:

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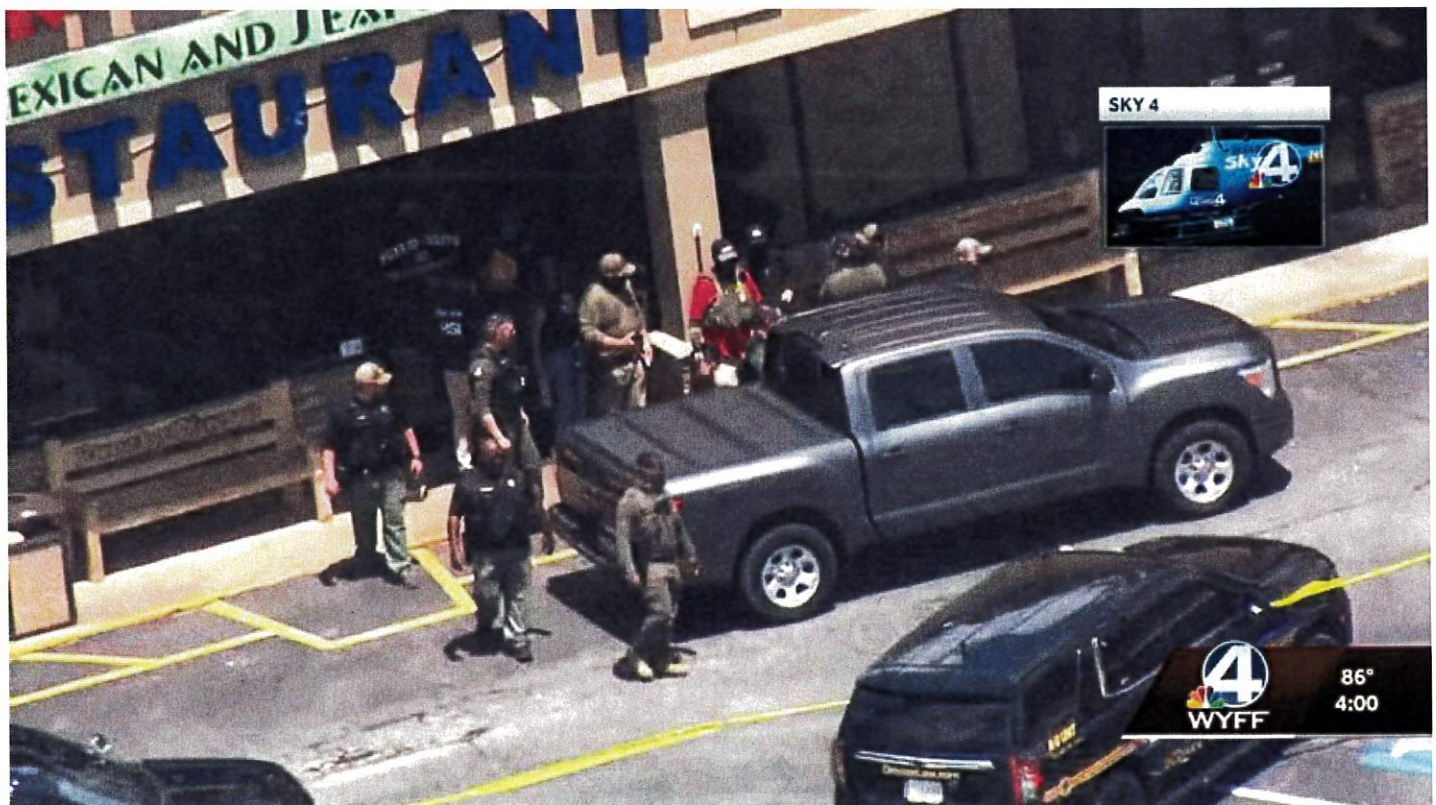
“The Homeland Security Investigations Greenville office executed a federal search warrant at Puerto Nuevo Restaurant in West Union, South Carolina. During the operation, agents rescued two juvenile victims of human trafficking and arrested eight individuals on immigration charges. The investigation remains ongoing.

“Worksite immigration enforcement protects workers from exploitation and trafficking like these children who were trafficked.”

Here is a timeline on what has happened this week:

Wednesday:

Agents and law enforcement were seen at the Puerto Nuevo and Seafood Restaurant on Foothill Center Drive in Oconee County. WYFF News 4 started getting calls about the situation about 11:30 a.m.



Sky 4 flew over the scene and saw a large area in front of the restaurant roped off with crime scene tape and agents and law enforcement outside. We later saw about a dozen officials walk out of the restaurant and then leave the scene.



WYFF News 4

West Union Police Chief Ben Hailey told WYFF News 4 on Wednesday that his agency assisted the Department of Homeland Security and Homeland Security Investigations with a federal criminal investigation.



WYFF News 4

The West Union Police Department posted the following message on Facebook:

"The West Union Police Department and OCSO assisted HSI with a criminal investigation today in the Foothills Center plaza including Puerto Nuevo. This was not an ICE raid or Immigration Enforcement. Two subjects were arrested today for Disorderly Conduct, one of which had a firearm and was ordered several times not to touch said firearm after entering the scene. The subject was quickly taken into custody without incident. HSI's investigation is ongoing and any requests for information about their investigation should be directed to the HSI PIO."

Thursday:

WYFF News 4 spoke to the manager of Puerto Nuevo and Seafood Restaurant.

Watch the full interviews in the video below:

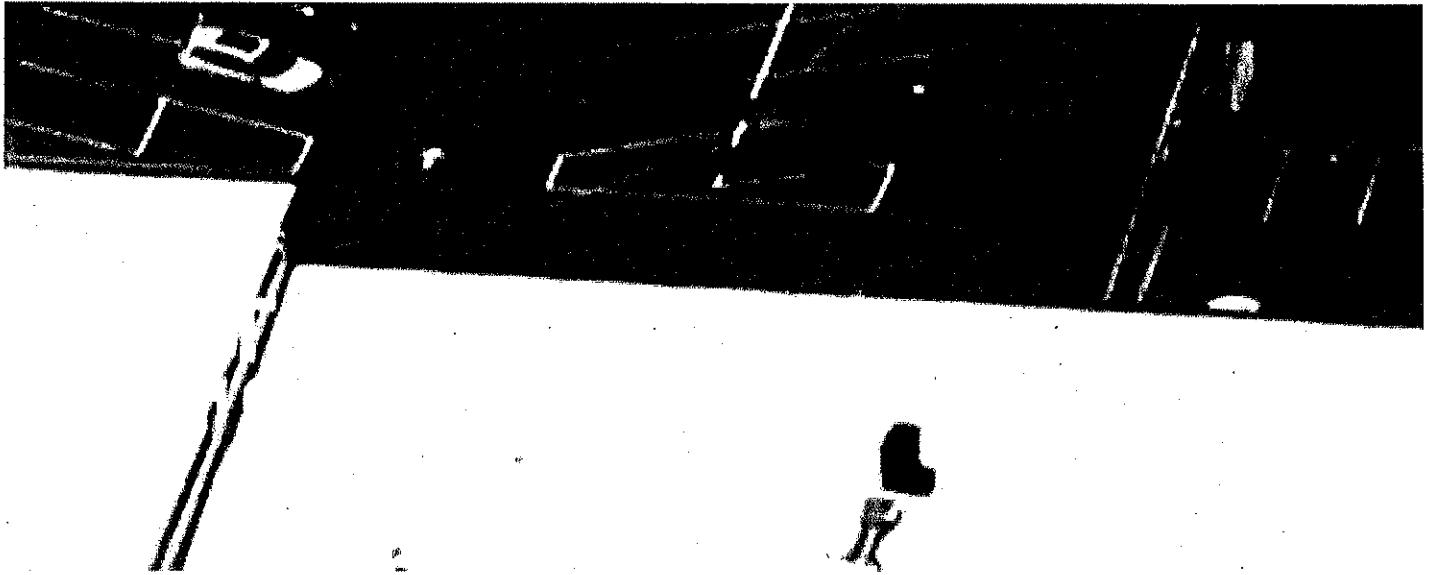


Juan Leon said he was there when federal agents arrived at the establishment, and he received a phone call.

"We checked the cameras. There are people in uniforms taking our workers out of there, so I immediately came down here," Leon said.

Leon also said he was one of the two people arrested on Wednesday and was released Thursday morning.





"I didn't care about the yellow tape. I was trying to barge in and let them know that I need paperwork. I need to see some type of warrant or anything," Leon said. "Because this is private property. If we were renting here, I understand by all means, you know, go ahead and do what you've got to do, but it's private property. I need to see documents. Y'all want to do things legal, I need to see legal documents."

West Union police said one of the individuals arrested had a firearm and was ordered not to touch it.

"I did have a gun on my waist just for my own protection. Just like they have," Leon said. "I never pulled it out."

Leon said eight workers were taken to an immigration hold facility in Atlanta.

"I didn't see anybody with ICE, but ICE does work with Homeland Security," Leon said.

"I want the public to know that this is a family-oriented restaurant, so we got plenty of them," Leon said. "They are hardworking people."



Leon said there are talks of protests being organized. As for the restaurant, according to Leon, it will be a little while before it reopens.


Friday:

A statement from Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin released this statement to WYFF News 4:






“The Homeland Security Investigations Greenville office executed a federal search warrant at Puerto Nuevo Restaurant in West Union, South Carolina. During the operation, agents rescued two juvenile victims of human trafficking and arrested eight individuals on immigration charges. The investigation remains ongoing.

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 **49° F** MOSTLY CLOUDY
FEELS LIKE 44°F

HOURLY DAILY

12 PM	1 PM	2 PM	3 PM	4 PM
 49° /39%	 51° /15%	 52° /1%	 52° /1%	 53° /1%

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