

VIRGINIA: Prostitution bust nabs minister with child

Written by Laura Geller, WWBT NBC12
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RICHMOND, VA (WWBT) – A minister was busted in a local prostitution sting with his two-year-old child with him during the solicitation, according to police.

30-year-old Robert Franco Jr. was one of 34 people arrested by Richmond Police over the six-day operation. The woman Franco thought was a prostitute turned out to be an undercover officer.

"It was a different type of case, I mean, a different scenario than they're used to," explained Richmond Police Major Michael Shamus. "You don't see people bringing their two-year-old infant. So that was a first for me."

Franco Jr. is from Medford, New Jersey but has family in the area. Now, he's facing solicitation and felony child endangerment charges.

"They say that this is a victimless crime and it's not," Shamus told us. "That two-year-old is a victim, as well."

During this sting, the department covered the entire city. Every precinct was involved. Neighbors had been complaining about prostitution activity in the Chamberlayne Avenue corridor. Then, undercover officers headed across the river to areas like Hull Street and Jeff Davis Highway. They also hit other hot spots like Midlothian Turnpike.

Major Shamus believes the 21 women and 13 men arrested were causing quality of life issues for Richmonders.

"Do you want prostitutes to walk in front of your house day and night?" he asked. "Do you want people picking them up? And with that comes drug use, larcenies and other crimes."

Officials said they let the public know about the busts as a deterrent.

"Don't come into the city and try to pick up prostitutes because you never know who you'll be picking up," he warned.

Prostitution and solicitation are class one misdemeanors. If convicted, these people face jail time and a fine.

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<http://www.14news.com/story/17168062/busted-cops-nab-33-in-prostitution-sting>