

Florida Missing Endangered Persons Information  
Clearinghouse Advisory Board

# MISSING & ENDANGERED

FALL 2024 / ISSUE 13

## NEWSLETTER

FLORIDA MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY EDITION

A TIME OF  
REMEMBRANCE



# WHAT IS THE

## Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board?

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board (MEPICAB) was established in 1996 to address issues regarding Florida's missing children. It was later expanded to include missing endangered adults and seniors. The MEPICAB meets quarterly to implement plans and policies that create strategies to raise awareness of the high number of children and endangered adults that go missing every year. The Board's mission is to support awareness, education and training for the prevention, response and recovery of missing and endangered persons.

Board members represent a diverse group of law enforcement officials, government agencies, impacted families, non-profit organizations, private sector partners and community members interested in missing person issues.

Missing & Endangered





Sophie was last seen in Fort Lauderdale, Florida on May 19, 2017. Sophie was 15 years old at the time of her disappearance.

On the night of Sophie's disappearance, surveillance footage caught her walking near the Brightline track wearing a black dress with a leopard-print fur coat, and light-colored headphones.

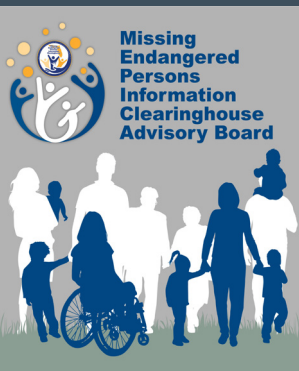
Sophie's photo has been age-progressed to 20 years old as shown in the bottom right corner. Sophie's case remains unsolved.

# MISSING

## Sophie Reeder



If you have any information about this case, please contact the Fort Lauderdale Police Department at 954-828-5700 or the FDLE MEPIC Hotline at 1-888-FL MISSING (1-888-356-4774).







## Florida's Cabinet Members Recognize Florida's Missing Children

**Attorney General Ashley Moody said,** "As a mother, I cannot imagine the terror a parent feels when their child goes missing. Florida law enforcement works around the clock to find those who are lost, and on Missing Children's Day, we stand in support of those who wear the badge and are diligently pursuing these cases. We must continue to pray that these children are reunited with their families and returned home safely."

**Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis said,** "As a father of two, the thought of a missing child is gut wrenching and a nightmare no family should have to go through. The fight to protect Florida's children is a community wide effort to ensure every child is safe, cherished, and accounted for. On Missing Children's Day, my heart goes out to the families impacted by the loss of a child, and I am grateful for our dedicated law enforcement officials and state and local agencies working around the clock to bring Florida's missing children home."

**Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson said,** "On Florida Missing Children's Day, we come together to stand in solidarity with the families who endure the unimaginable pain of not knowing where their child is or if they are safe. I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated law enforcement officers, child advocates, and community members who work tirelessly, driven by hope, to bring our missing children back home where they belong. Each precious child is missing but not forgotten."

**FDLE Commissioner Mark Glass said,** "Today, as we commemorate Florida's lost daughters and sons and pay tribute to the families who live with unthinkable agony, we also reaffirm our commitment that we will not ever stop searching for these precious missing children and we will never stop searching for justice."

### THE FLORIDA ALERT SYSTEM SAVES LIVES

1 AMBER Alert issued & 1 resolved

21 Missing Child Alerts issued & 20 resolved

44 State Silver Alerts issued & 44 resolved

14 State Purple Alerts issued & 14 resolved

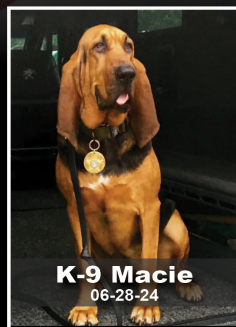
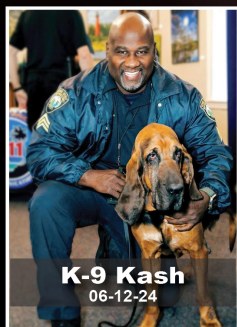
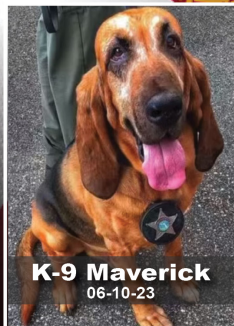
Information from July 1st, 2024 - September 30th, 2024

You can find current missing person alerts by visiting <https://www.fdle.state.fl.us/mcicsearch/AllCurrentAlerts.asp>.





# FLORIDA SALUTES OUR FALLEN MISSING PERSON K9S 2023-2024



**REST IN PEACE**



2024 Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse Advisory Board





## 2024 Florida Missing Children's Day Award Winners

*During a formal ceremony, Commissioner Glass recognized citizens, canine trailing teams and law enforcement officers for their exemplary efforts in investigations protecting children.*



### Commissioner's Award

Investigator Maribel Ojeda | Orlando Police Department

In December of 2023, the Florida Department of Children and Families notified Orlando Police Department of an allegation that parents had abandoned a premature infant at a local hospital and fled to Puerto Rico with their two other children. Ojeda's investigation led to her locating the two children in poor conditions without food or clean clothing in Puerto Rico. Ojeda worked with four law enforcement agencies and three state child protective agencies to safely return the children to Florida and issue warrants for the parents.



### Evelyn Williams Memorial Award

Ms. Michaela Darty | Florida Department of Children and Families

In the past year, Darty worked on two complex human trafficking operations, We Will Find You in May of 2023, and Seminole Saber in May of 2024, that together recovered more than 50 children. Working with local, state and federal agencies, Darty established recovery sites and directly supported law enforcement command centers.



### John and Revé Walsh Award

Ms. Kristin Morgan | Florida Department of Children and Families

Working with local, state, federal and out of state agencies, Morgan provides support on high risk missing children cases. She is a liaison with FDLE's Missing Endangered Persons Information Clearinghouse and their advisory board. She contributes to locating and recovering children and assists in child transport services. Recently Morgan assisted in helping determine jurisdiction for three young children between multiple agencies and she also assisted in locating a child in another state who was safely returned to caregivers in Florida.





**Local Law Enforcement Officers of the Year Award**  
**Detectives Chase King and Henrik Östhed**  
**Marion County Sheriff's Office**

In November of 2023, the Marion County Sheriff's Office received a call about a runaway child. Detectives King and Östhed's investigation revealed that the child had not ran away, but had been kidnapped by an adult Tennessee man. The man had been communicating with and grooming the child on a gaming app. The detectives believed the child was in extreme danger. Within hours of receiving the case, Detectives King and Östhed identified, located and arrested the suspect in Tennessee and recovered the child unharmed. Additionally, the detectives continue to work other leads connected to this case and have uncovered a network of sexual abusers that prey on children throughout the United States and the world.



**Law Enforcement Task Force/Team of the Year Award:**

**Detectives Josh Dawson and Justin Dillon | Alachua County Sheriff's Office**

**Resident Agent in Charge William Porter | Florida Department of Law Enforcement**

**Special Agents Calvin Lee, Roy Long and Tracy Rousseau | Florida Department of Law Enforcement**

**Special Agent Joel Richards | Homeland Security Investigations**

**Agent Henry Shultz | Texas Department of Public Safety**

In July of 2023, FDLE received a request for assistance from the Texas Department of Public Safety (Texas DPS) concerning a 16-year-old child that had disappeared from Texas two weeks prior. Texas DPS had tracked the child's social media accounts to a Florida suspect. FDLE conducted surveillance of the suspect's home and analysts located a police report filed in June 2023 of a female screaming for help in the woods by the suspect's residence. The FDLE investigation, with assistance from the Alachua County Sheriff's Office and Texas DPS, led to a search of the suspect's home and the recovery of the child. The juvenile had been lured to Florida with the promise of a better life. Instead, she was tortured, starved, drugged and assaulted until her rescue. Two suspects were arrested and pled guilty to federal charges.





## State Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award Trooper Trent Sistrunk | Florida Highway Patrol

In November of 2023, Trooper Sistrunk received a call about a 12-year-old child who had gone missing, who might have been traveling on a Greyhound bus. Sistrunk located the bus in Hamilton County and personally checked on each passenger, ultimately locating the child. The child was alone and unharmed, but Sistrunk learned the child had been a victim of crimes in Florida and other states.



## Combatting Human Trafficking Award Ms. Karen Sztukowski | Escambia County Sheriff's Office

Between November of 2023 and March of 2024, an endangered missing 15-year-old girl was the victim of human trafficking in multiple jurisdictions. Administrative Support Assistant Sztukowski collected, analyzed and disseminated crucial information to local, state, federal and non-profit agencies working on the case. Her work directly assisted in the successful recovery of the juvenile victim and the arrest of one of the suspects.



## Citizen of the Year Award Mr. Timothy Williams

In August of 2023, an adult male attempted to kidnap an 11-year-old girl at her bus stop. The girl fought back until Williams, a local parent and off-duty Department of Corrections worker, intervened and detained the suspect until law enforcement arrived. The suspect confessed that he planned on abducting and sexually assaulting the young girl. Because of Williams' actions the girl is safe.



## Jimmy Ryce Trailing Team of the Year Deputy Kelli Covet & K-9 Anthem | Broward County Sheriff's Office

On a December 2023 evening with 25 mph winds, deputies from the Broward County Sheriff's Office were urgently dispatched to a residence where a 9-year-old autistic child in diapers has suddenly gone missing. Deputy Covet and K-9 Anthem were among the first to arrive to the scene. Covet used a sterile gauze to absorb the child's scent from one of the child's shoes and Anthem navigated the child's trail. When Anthem suddenly changed direction, the child's father spotted his son in the roadway. The father specifically noted that Anthem's change in direction was instrumental in finding his son and expressed profound gratitude for the skilled actions of Covet and Anthem.





### School Bus Operator of the Year Award

Ms. Ramonita Cancel | Seminole County Public Schools

During a routine morning bus route, Cancel witnessed a suspicious interaction between a 9-year-old child and an adult male in a pickup truck. Recognizing that the child was uncomfortable, Cancel intervened and confronted the man. She pursued the man and provided vital information about the suspect to law enforcement, which was pivotal in the suspect's apprehension.



### Maple Everyday Hero Award

Community Service Officer Tyron Crook  
Kissimmee Police Department

In 2023, Crook was assigned more than 78 missing persons cases, of which 31 were missing children cases. Because of Crook's investigative efforts, all 31 missing children were successfully recovered, often within days of the initial report.



### Florida Missing Children's Day Student Contest Winners

Florida Missing Children's Day recognizes this year's poster winner, essay contest winner, and National Anthem contest winner. The goal of these contests is to provide an opportunity for teachers, families, and communities to discuss ways for children to protect themselves from abduction.

If you have a student or child interested in participating, please visit the Florida Missing Children's Day Foundation at [www.fmcd.org](http://www.fmcd.org) to see the related requirements and deadlines. Submissions will open in December 2024.

### Poster Contest Winner | Suah

Suah's winning poster depicts the moon and stars, symbolizing the importance of hope despite darkness. The 2024 statewide billboard's design was based on Suah's artwork, and can be found on page 9 of the newsletter. The poster contest is open to Florida 5th graders.

### Essay Contest Winner | Davis

In Davis' essay, he explains several ways for children to prevent and resist abduction. He includes helpful tips regarding what to do if abducted, and ways to stay safe online. Davis states, "...If the abductor grabs you, feel free to kick, punch, elbow, scream, yell, do anything to try to pry yourself loose from the abductor's grip." The essay contest is open to Florida 5th graders.

### National Anthem Contest Winner | Valentina

Valentina performed her rendition of the National Anthem during this year's ceremony. The National Anthem contest is open to elementary and middle schoolers, and the winner will perform at next year's Florida Missing Children's Day ceremony on September 8, 2025.



# MAPLE'S

## Everyday Hero Award



**MAPLE**  
K-9 Officer  
End of Watch 2024

In memory of K-9 Maple, who served Florida as FDLE's first Electronic Storage Detection (ESD) canine officer. Maple, along with her handler, Special Agent Supervisor Stephanie Cassidy, was deployed over 100 times to locate digital evidence in cases from child pornography to terrorism.

## 2024 FLORIDA MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY

Bringing Our Missing Children Home!





1-888-FL-MISSING ■ [missingchildrenalert.com](http://missingchildrenalert.com) ■ [fmcdf.org](http://fmcdf.org)