



# Department of Justice

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OASG  
(202) 514- 2007  
TTY (866) 544-5309

## **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT RECOGNIZES INVESTIGATIVE EFFORTS OF MARYLAND DETECTIVE IN MISSING GIRL CASE**

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice today honored Detective John Witherspoon of the Montgomery County Police Department in Rockville, Maryland, for his investigation into the disappearance of a 15-year-old Gaithersburg girl and his support of Fairfax County, Virginia, police in their efforts to identify and arrest 10 gang members who were charged in the girl’s murder.

Acting Associate Attorney General Jesse Panuccio presented Witherspoon with the Missing Children’s Law Enforcement Award during the Justice Department’s National Missing Children’s Day ceremony. This award recognizes law enforcement officers’ efforts for significant investigative or program contributions to child safety.

Additionally, Witherspoon successfully recovered 166 missing children last year.

“Detective Witherspoon demonstrated unusual tenacity in tracking down the vicious murderers of a teenage girl, and also showed extraordinary compassion in supporting her family through the investigation,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jesse Panuccio. “The Department commends Detective Witherspoon for his remarkable combination of personal and professional commitment in this case.”

For eight weeks, Witherspoon searched throughout the Washington metropolitan region for sightings of the missing girl. He also combed social media sites and accounts and interviewed the girl’s friends and family members. The remains of the girl were found near an industrial area in Fairfax County, and the medical examiner ruled the case a homicide. Witherspoon worked with Fairfax County police to locate 10 members of a local gang who played a role in the girl’s murder. He then helped the victim’s mother arrange a community memorial service, and later coordinated her witness relocation after she received death threats from gang members.

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In addition to Witherspoon, the Department also honored the efforts of law enforcement officers in other jurisdictions who investigated crimes against children and arrested the suspects and a private citizen who rescued a missing and abducted child. Panuccio also recognized Eden Hoffmann, a fifth grader at Huron Elementary School in Clinton Township, Michigan, as the 19th winner of the National Missing Children's Day poster contest.

Additional information about [National Missing Children's Day](#) is available online.

The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Alan R. Hanson, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six bureaus and offices: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART). More information about OJP and its components can be found at [www.ojp.gov](http://www.ojp.gov).

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