



NEWS RELEASE –

January 27, 2020

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Denver's Law Enforcement Announce First-of-Its Kind Charges Against Alleged Human Traffickers

DENVER—At a press conference this morning, Denver District Attorney Beth McCann and Denver Police Chief Paul Pazen announced that a Denver Grand Jury indicted two individuals on financial crimes for allegedly profiting from the trafficking of humans. At the core, this case is about a well-organized human trafficking ring led by Ms. Xiaoli Gao (age 51) and Mr. Zhong Wei Zhang (age 49). Gao and Zhang are charged with violating the Colorado Organized Crime Control Act (F2), conspiracy to commit pimping (F4), pimping (F3), conspiracy to commit money laundering (F4), money laundering (F3), conspiracy to commit keeping a place of prostitution (M3), keeping a place of prostitution (M2) and filing a false tax return (F5).

“This is the first time my office has used financial crime to indict alleged traffickers which has the elegance of sparing the trafficked women from testifying while also charging Gao and Zhang with a class two felony,” said Denver DA McCann. “By following the money, we are alleging a case of financial crimes that led from one Denver home, to massage parlors around Denver, to bank accounts in China.”

“January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month and this case exemplifies how human trafficking touches every community and why it’s important that if you see something, you say something,” said Chief Pazen. “It was because concerned neighbors did the right thing and called the National Human Trafficking Hotline, that we are standing here today while Gao and Zhang remain in jail.”

The Denver District Attorney’s Office and Denver Police Department created dedicated human trafficking investigation teams in 2017 and 2019 respectively that, in close partnership with the

Denver Police Victim Assistance Unit and community-based victim services, collectively work to prevent human trafficking, and provide care and supportive resources to victims. The National Human Trafficking Hotline Number is 1-888-373-7888 and the Colorado Human Trafficking Hotline is 1-866-455-5075.

Gao and Zhang will be arraigned on February 10, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. in courtroom 2A. These case numbers are 19CR15444 (Gao) and 19CR15445 (Zhang).

The filing of a criminal charge is merely a formal accusation that an individual(s) committed a crime(s) under Colorado laws. A defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. *See* Colo. RPC 3.6