



# Department of Justice

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Western District of North Carolina

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## **DAVIDSON NAIL SALON OWNER CONVICTED OF FORCED LABOR**

*Defendant's scheme to compel the victim's labor included physical violence, a fabricated debt, paycheck confiscation, and threats of violence and reputational harm, among others*

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – The Justice Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office announced today that after a five-day trial, a federal jury in Charlotte found Thuy Tien Luong, 37, of Charlotte, guilty of forced labor after finding that Luong compelled the labor of one of her nail technicians at a nail salon she owned and operated in Davidson, North Carolina.

“More than 150 years after the United States ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, human trafficking remains a problem in our cities, our towns, and our communities,” said Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Eric Dreiband. “Like slave masters of old, human traffickers are adept at targeting the most vulnerable members of our society and using coercive and violent tactics to intimidate and compel their services. We must and will confront and defeat this vile conduct, like this defendant's, and the Department of Justice will continue its vigorous and systematic efforts to hold human traffickers accountable, bring justice to their victims, and prevent them from harming others.”

“Through the infliction of mental and physical abuse, Luong despicably preyed upon the victim's hardships and personal vulnerabilities for her own selfish financial gains,” said U.S. Attorney Andrew Murray. “Forced labor schemes are an assault on human dignity and have no place in modern society. My office remains committed to combatting all forms of human trafficking and prosecuting perpetrators to the fullest extent of the law.”

“Traffickers treat human beings as commodities, and this case is no exception. They use force, fraud or coercion to prey on people's vulnerabilities,” said Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Charlotte Special Agent in Charge Ronnie Martinez. “HSI special agents will continue to focus their efforts on eradicating this heinous crime; no one should be subject to human trafficking.”

“Davidson police officers and investigators took immediate action when this horrific crime was reported by the brave victim,” said Chief Penny L. Dunn of the Davidson Police Department. “We are extremely grateful for the quick response of Special Agents of Homeland Security and for the pursuit of justice for victims by the U.S. Attorney's Office. The case is an example of how domestic trafficking can and does happen anywhere in our nation.”

Evidence presented at trial established that Luong compelled the victim's labor from October 2016 to June 2018 through a variety of coercive means. Luong physically assaulted the victim on several occasions, including pulling her hair out, stabbing her with nail salon tools, and pouring acetone on her head. Luong also threatened to ruin the victim's reputation with her family by threatening to tell them information about the victim which would negatively impact the victim's relationship with her family. Luong falsely claimed that the victim owed her a debt of \$180,000, and falsely alleged that the victim's poor work performance caused Luong to lose this amount of money. Luong even executed a debt contract with the victim in the amount of \$180,000, and threatened to send the victim to jail if she did not repay all of it. In reality, the victim was a good employee. Luong often treated the victim in a humiliating and demeaning fashion, all while having her work 10 hours a day for 6 to 7 days a week. The totality of Luong's coercive scheme caused the victim to fear Luong and forced her to continue working for Luong until a particularly violent assault led to the victim reporting Luong to the Davidson Police Department and to Luong's subsequent arrest in June 2018.

Following entry of the guilty verdict, Luong was remanded into federal custody. A sentencing date has not been scheduled at this time, but it will occur before District Court Judge Kenneth D. Bell. The defendant faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and must pay mandatory restitution to the victim.

The case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations with the invaluable assistance of the Davidson Police Department and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Kimlani M. Ford of the Western District of North Carolina and Trial Attorney Maryam Zhuravitsky of the Civil Rights Division's Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit are prosecuting the case.

### ***January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month***

In recognition of National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, U.S. Attorney Murray highlights the continued efforts of the U.S. Attorney's Office to combat human trafficking, raise awareness, and prosecute perpetrators.

In addition to Luong's conviction of forced labor charges, in 2020, the U.S. Attorney's Office's anti-trafficking efforts resulted in significant prosecutions.

- In October, a federal grand jury indicted Dajuan Akeem Blair, 25, of Cornelius, N.C, on two counts of sex trafficking of two minors and child pornography charges.
- Simone Cherelle McIllwain, 29, of Matthews, N.C. was also indicted in October with sex trafficking of on a minor. McIllwain allegedly trafficked the minor while on federal supervised release for another federal sex trafficking conviction in Florida.
- On October 22, 2020, Xavier Boston, 31, of Charlotte, was sentenced to 40 years in federal prison. Boston was convicted by a jury of six counts of sex trafficking and one count of using an interstate facility to promote a prostitution enterprise.
- In August 2020, Timothy Johnson, 25, of Charlotte, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit human trafficking.

The charges against McIllwain and Blair are pending. The defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. A sentencing date for Johnson has not been set yet.

“Human trafficking is one of the most abhorrent crimes that can be inflicted upon another human being. Whether forced into unpaid labor or coerced into commercial sex acts, trafficking victims are reduced to commodities, their worth determined by how much a trafficker profits from them. In most cases, victims also endure great physical violence and mental abuse in the hands of the perpetrators,” said U.S. Attorney Murray. “Since launching our initiative to combat human trafficking, the U.S. Attorney’s Office has shed a light on this blight to modern society. We remain committed to educating the public and we will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to investigate and prosecute traffickers who exploit their victims for personal gain. While we have had many notable successes, our efforts to eradicate human trafficking in the Western District continue.”

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If you believe you are a victim or may have information about a potential trafficking situation, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888. NHTRC is a national, toll-free hotline, with specialists available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, related to potential trafficking victims, suspicious behaviors, and/or locations where trafficking is suspected to occur. You can also submit a tip to the NHTRC [online](#).

You can also contact ICE-Homeland Security Investigations at 1-866-DHS-2-ICE (1-866-347-2423) or the Charlotte Office of the FBI at 704-672-6100.

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