**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Florida Man Sentenced to 30 Years in Prison for Human Trafficking and Branding**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Pam Bondi’s Office of Statewide Prosecution today secured a prison sentence for a man convicted of human trafficking and branding a victim. Friday, a Marion County Judge sentenced Ryan Gemelle Polle, 33, to 30 years in state prison. The sentence comes after the jury found Poole guilty of human trafficking, deriving support from prostitution, unlawful use of a two-way communications device to facilitate a felony, sexual battery and branding. This is Florida’s first conviction under the state’s branding statute.

“This disgusting human trafficker branded his victim**,** raped and forced her to perform sex acts. We will not allow this evil to persist in Florida, and today’s sentencing serves as a strong warning to anyone trying to enslave and traffic people in our state,” said Attorney General Pam Bondi. “I want to thank my Statewide Prosecutors Julie Sercus and Rita Peters for their resolve and determination to ensure this monster did not escape justice.”

The Marion County Sheriff’s Office began investigating Poole in 2016. The investigation revealed that Poole met the victim on a dating website and started a romantic relationship. Poole then began grooming the victim for prostitution by giving the victim cocaine and coercing the victim to work as a stripper. Soon Poole began selling the victim for sex, advertising on the now defunct [Backpage.com](http://Backpage.com) website.

Poole forced the victim to travel from Marion County to Alachua, Charlotte, Hillsborough and Orange counties for the purposes of prostitution for personal financial gain. In addition, Poole forced the victim to have his initials tattooed on the victim’s body—to signify the victim as property. In August 2016, the victim tried to escape and Poole raped the victim as punishment.

The trial commenced on April 23, before the Honorable Anthony Tatti in Marion County.  After four days of testimony, including that of the victim and Poole, the jury found the defendant guilty on all charges.

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