

# THE FBI STORY

## 2023

Welcome to the 2023 edition of The FBI Story—a selection of our past year’s work as told through some of our website’s original stories and images.

This inside look at our people, programs, investigations, and operations only scratches the surface of the work we highlighted online in 2023 and is just a sampling of the work we do every day to protect the American people and uphold the Constitution of the United States.

You can view the complete versions of the stories featured in this publication and many more at [fbi.gov/stories](https://www.fbi.gov/stories).



FBI Director Christopher A. Wray

# THE FBI STORY

## 2023



IOD Hosts 2023 LEGAT/LNO Conference

# Director Wray Meets with Sheriffs to Discuss Partnerships, Progress, and Challenges



FBI Director Christopher Wray met with representatives of the nation's leading sheriff's organizations to reaffirm the FBI's commitment to strong partnerships and to discuss the myriad challenges facing law enforcement agencies.

"We're working right beside you, at really combat tempo, to lend as much support as we can," Wray said.

Wray delivered remarks at annual conferences of the Major County Sheriffs of America and the non-profit National Sheriffs' Association in Washington, D.C. Together, the organizations represent thousands of law enforcement professionals nationwide whose jurisdictions cover more than 130 million citizens.

Wray addressed the winter conference of Major County Sheriffs of America on January 31. The professional organization represents approximately 110 of the largest elected sheriff's offices in counties or parishes with populations of 500,000. Then, on February 8, he spoke at the National Sheriffs' Association's conference.

Topics included crime and national security challenges like violent crimes, gangs, drugs, border crime, terrorism, and violent extremism. During each meeting, Director Wray expressed concern about the continuing increase in murder rates, the release of repeat or dangerous offenders from prison, and the rise in radicalized juveniles inspired by violent radical ideologies and extremist groups.







## FBI National Academy Class Rallies Around Texas Boy

Officers from more than 50 law enforcement agencies come together to help DJ Daniel reach a lofty goal

The FBI's National Academy has long been a force multiplier for law enforcement as it brings together executives from hundreds of departments for joint training and professional development sessions. On December 5, 2022, it was a force multiplier for an 11-year-old from Pearland, Texas, who is on a mission to be sworn in by 758 law enforcement agencies.

Devarjaye "DJ" Daniel has brain cancer and is pursuing his ambitious goal to raise awareness of childhood cancers and to honor the memory of another young Texan and law enforcement supporter who died from the disease in 2019. Seven-year-old Abigail Arias was given honorary badge number 758 and known as Officer Abigail by her hometown department in Freeport, Texas.

DJ has been busy gathering honorary credentials from hundreds of police and sheriffs' departments with the goal of reaching the number (758) of Abigail's badge. The FBI's current National Academy Session added more than 50 to his list in just one day.

Created in 1935, the FBI National Academy is a leadership training program for current law enforcement officers from the United States and abroad. This session allowed DJ to be sworn in by agencies that stretch from Fairbanks, Alaska, to Miami Beach, Florida, and even across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom. The entire class worked hard to coordinate with their home agencies to make the special day possible for DJ and his family.

Before DJ was sworn in by agencies from National Academy Session 284, FBI Director Christopher Wray met with him and his family and gave DJ honorary FBI special agent credentials.

"DJ Daniel's journey brings unity to all law enforcement agencies, and the FBI National Academy is the ideal setting to demonstrate collective strength," said FBI Dallas Special Agent Deborah Michaels, who serves as a counselor for this National Academy Session. "We are proud to be a part of DJ's mission."





# Chinese High-Altitude Balloon Recovery

Behind the Bureau's role as the lead governing agency for the forensic examination of the Chinese high-altitude balloon

In a news briefing on February 9, senior FBI officials detailed the Bureau's role as the lead governing agency for the forensic examination of the Chinese high-altitude balloon identified and shot down February 5 by the U.S. military off the coast of South Carolina.

The Operational Technology Division and the Laboratory Division worked closely with subject matter experts from the Department of Defense—including the Naval Criminal Investigative Service—and other government agencies.

Additionally, personnel from the FBI's Washington, Columbia, Charlotte, and Norfolk field offices deployed personnel, including ERT- and USERT-trained agents, to assist with the logistics of the recovery and analysis of the debris.

Michael Paul, assistant director of the Operational and Technology Division (OTD), and Eric Pokorak, assistant director of the Laboratory Division, said it was too early in the investigation to determine the intent and capabilities of the balloon.

Pokorak said much of the evidence remained underwater and that the FBI was coordinating further searches with the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. Dive teams from the FBI and U.S. Navy worked together.

"We were on-scene late Sunday, on February 5, and the first evidence that was received was transported to Quantico and received late Monday, February 6," he explained. Pokorak described the search area as a "large-scale scene" and said weather concerns in the next few days "may impact" evidence collection and the transportation of recovered items.



# FBI's Underwater Search and Evidence Response Team (USERT)

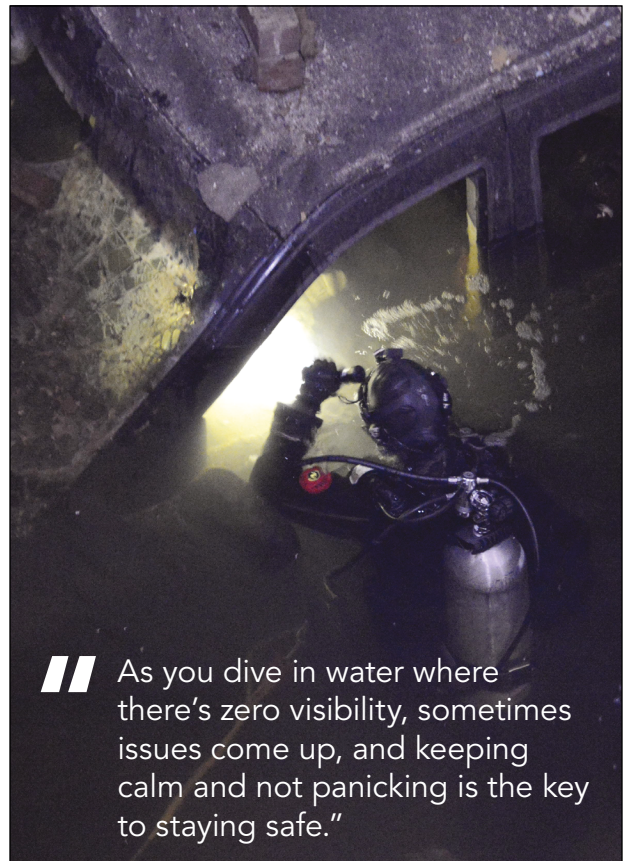
USERT comprises a group of highly trained FBI special agents tasked with searching for and recovering evidence underwater.

USERT grew out of the New York Field Office's dive team, which was established in the 1980s. Initially, two agents who were recreational divers began finding weapons on their dives, many of which turned out to have connections to criminal cases. Word spread, and the requests for their special skill sets led to the creation of the New York Dive Team.

Today, USERT is part of the Evidence Response Team Unit (ERTU) within the FBI Laboratory. USERT divers are based out of the New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Washington field offices and collaborate on cases across the country. With a total of 64 divers for the program, there are approximately 16 divers in each of the four field offices.

USERT members are not only expert divers—each one joined the FBI as an agent with a broad range of skill sets. Every agent can have a specialized collateral duty, in addition to their other responsibilities, which can take up to 25% of their time. USERT falls under this category, requiring tryouts to make the team and then rigorous training to prepare for the often grueling underwater work.

With USERT's specialization, they get called in for the toughest underwater recovery cases.



“As you dive in water where there’s zero visibility, sometimes issues come up, and keeping calm and not panicking is the key to staying safe.”







## FBI Edges Secret Service in Charity Hockey Game

### 2023 matchup honors fallen agent

The FBI narrowly defeated its hockey rivals, the U.S. Secret Service, in a 2-1 win on March 4.

The sold-out charity game was expected to raise at least \$20,000 to benefit the families of fallen law enforcement officers. It also paid special tribute to fallen FBI Miami Special Agent Daniel Alfin.

Following a fierce effort by both teams that saw them neck-and-neck at the start of the third period, the FBI clinched the game-winning goal in the matchup's final minutes.

"Typically, these games are close," said Kyle Miller, an FBI auditor and analyst who plays defense for the Bureau's hockey team. "It always comes down to who can make the plays in the end, and, fortunately, we were able to do that again this year."







// The FBI is committed to ensuring our work environment supports the recruitment, development, and advancement of our female sworn officers."



## FBI Takes 30x30 Pledge to Recruit More Women Agents, Police

Efforts expected to advance diversity, strengthen partnerships, and enhance operational success

The FBI has joined a push to recruit more female sworn law enforcement officers and to empower them professionally.

In its commitment to the 30x30 Initiative, the FBI and other participating law enforcement agencies have pledged to:

- Increase representation of women in recruiting classes to at least 30% by 2030
- Promote agency culture and standards that set up female officers for success
- Share progress, successes, and challenges with others in the 30x30 network.

"The FBI is committed to ensuring our work environment supports the recruitment, development, and advancement of our female sworn officers," said FBI Director Christopher Wray the FBI's decision to take the 30x30 Pledge.

"This important commitment reflects our continued dedication to bringing more women into our special agent cadre, FBI police, and the FBI's leadership ranks. We are honored to join more than 260 of our policing partners in making this commitment."

Law enforcement agencies from across the United States—and a handful from Canada—have also taken the pledge. Private sector and academic organizations are also taking part in the wider 30x30 effort. The National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives and the New York University School of Law's Policing Project are sponsoring the initiative.

"The Department of Justice joined this effort in September 2022 to help fulfill the executive order on advancing effective, accountable policing and criminal justice practices to enhance public trust and public safety," explained Kisha Winston, a supervisory special agent in the FBI's Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

"That directive called for strengthening federal law enforcement recruitment, hiring, promotions, and retention practices with a focus on promoting an inclusive, diverse, and expert law enforcement workforce." She added that making law enforcement agencies better mirror the communities they serve will enhance public safety.

FBI Chief Diversity Officer Scott McMillion agreed, adding that the distinctive approach that female FBI agents and police officers bring will help the Bureau effectively fulfill its mission to the American people.



## Marathon Bombing Anniversary

FBI Boston marks 10-year-anniversary by honoring victims, recalling responders' heroic efforts

Leading up to the 10-year anniversary of the bombing at the Boston Marathon—and the ensuing manhunt and investigation that was the FBI's largest terrorism case since 9/11—the special agent in charge of FBI Boston asked his entire office to pause and reflect on the crucible of that massive investigation as they prepared for this year's 127th running.

Three people were killed on April 15, 2013, when two pressure-cooker bombs detonated 11 seconds apart on Boylston Street near the finish line of the iconic 26-mile race. More than 500 people were physically injured, including 17 who suffered amputations. The bombers also took the life of Sean Collier, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police officer who was executed while on patrol.

During the event, large images of the victims were arrayed in a conference room at the Boston Field Office, along with a whiteboard that agents used to sketch out their plans and the wanted posters that helped identify the suspects, brothers Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev. A moment of silence preceded the remembrance ceremony.

"It was important, first and foremost, to honor the victims," said Joseph Bonavolonta, special agent in charge of the Boston Division.

But he also wanted to enlighten the office's large cadre of young agents, analysts, and professionals—many not around 10 years ago—who may not fully appreciate the all-hands-on-deck response required in major cases like this.

Operation SpecTor spanned three continents, seized millions of dollars, and removed tens of thousands of potentially lethal drugs from circulation

"The availability of dangerous substances like fentanyl on darknet marketplaces is helping to fuel the crisis that has claimed far too many American lives," FBI Director Christopher Wray said. "That's why we will continue to join forces with our law enforcement partners around the globe to attack this problem together."

"These darknet marketplaces and vendors are not limited by geographical boundaries, requiring us to work closely with our international partners," said Kristen Varel, a supervisory special agent in the FBI's High Tech Organized Crime Unit, which coordinates the JCODE operations. "We focus on those vendors operating on U.S. soil, but we also investigate the marketplace infrastructure, which is frequently located overseas, often in European countries."



# National Police Week 2023

FBI honors fallen law enforcement officers and employees during annual memorial observances

A candlelight vigil paying tribute to law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty drew thousands to the National Mall on May 14 in Washington, D.C. The solemn gathering was the signature event of National Police Week, an annual tribute to law enforcement officers across the U.S. who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The vigil came a few days after a Special Agent Memorial Service at FBI Headquarters honoring the memories of fallen FBI agents. As part of this event, Director Christopher Wray helped lay a wreath in the building's courtyard on May 11 to honor the 92 Bureau employees who have lost their lives in the line of duty since 1925.

In addition, two new names were added to the FBI's Wall of Honor: Supervisory Police Officer (Lt.) Yiu Tak "Louis" Tao and Supervisory Administrative Specialist Bryan A. Myers. Both died in 2022 from illnesses related to toxic air exposure during 9/11 recovery efforts.





## Assisting Crime Victims

### Navajo FBI employee serves victims after crimes occur on indigenous lands

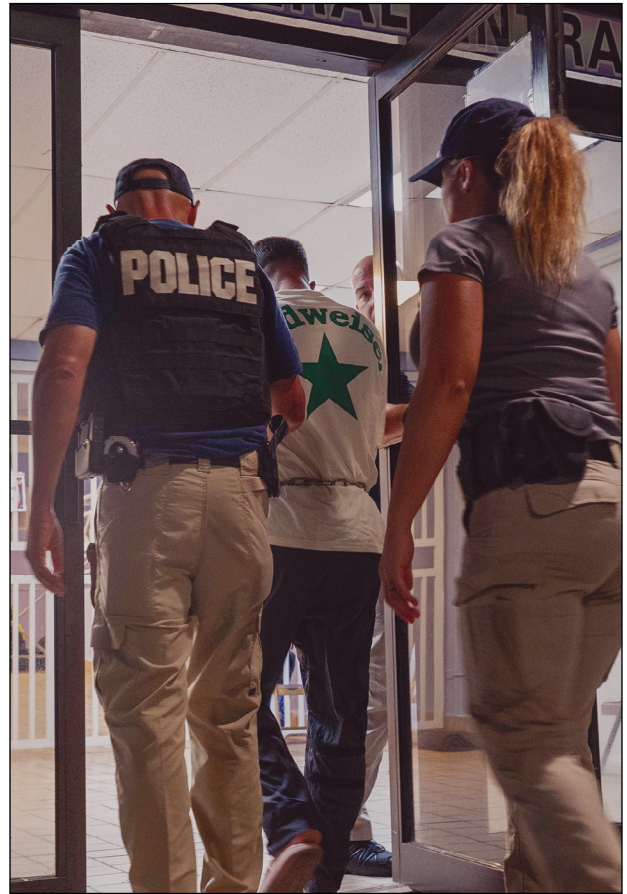
After shoveling her SUV from a late-winter snow, Blanda Preston buckled in with her coffee and set off from her office in Flagstaff to Tuba City, Arizona, about 80 miles north on the Navajo Nation. The FBI victim specialist had a meeting there with a local victim advocacy group, so she was looking at about 90 minutes of what she calls “windshield time.”

“One-way, it can take me one to four hours,” Preston said matter-of-factly, describing her more remote meetings and call-outs. “By the time I’ve met with one or two of my contacts, it’s sometimes just enough time to head back. So, travel’s a challenge.”

Navigating to distant, obscure, and sometimes missing pins on a map is part of the job in what the federal government refers to as Indian Country, where the FBI investigates the most serious crimes on nearly 200 reservations. More than 150 special agents work alongside tribal and federal partners on Native American lands. Federal law requires that victims of crimes like murder, child and adult sexual abuse, kidnapping, and violent felony assaults receive resources and support. For the FBI, that role belongs to the Victim Services Division (VSD) and victim specialists like Preston.







## Combating Violence on the Streets of San Juan

40 defendants face charges related to drugs, firearms, and murder

An investigation led by the FBI, with the assistance of several local and federal organizations, resulted in the arrests and indictments of dozens of members of a violent drug trafficking gang, Los 1,500, based in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

On June 8, 2023, a federal grand jury charged 40 individuals with conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute, possession and distribution of controlled substances, and firearm charges.

The FBI San Juan Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Force led the operation, and the collaborative efforts among the task force and other agencies—such as the Puerto Rico Department of Finance, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Inspector General (HUD-OIG), Puerto Rico Police Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Prisons, the San Juan Municipal Police, and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) San Juan Office—resulted in a successful mission.

Melvin Vélez-Carrasquillo, a San Juan Municipal Police task force officer for FBI San Juan, shared how the joint effort led to the arrests and indictments. “The advantage of working with different agencies is being able to expand your investigation

and concentrate resources where they are most needed. Each agency should have an objective that will help understand the organization’s modus operandi,” said Velez-Carrasquillo. “For example, for this investigation, HUD-OIG helped us understand how the organization was using abandoned or empty apartment units to further the conspiracy.”

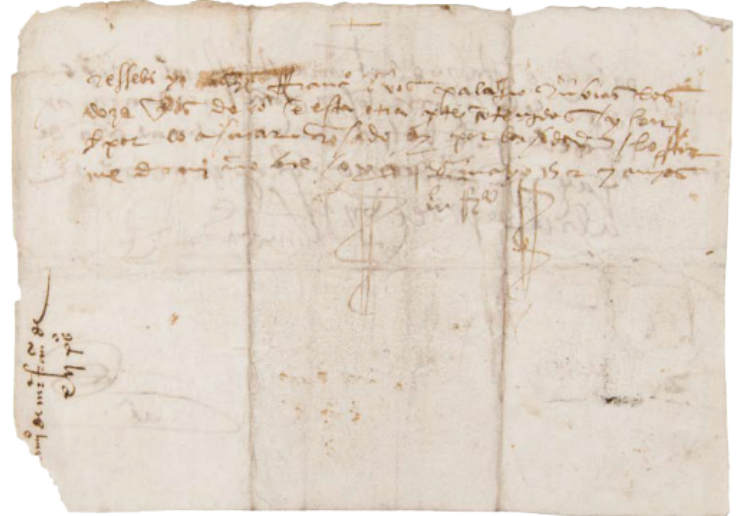
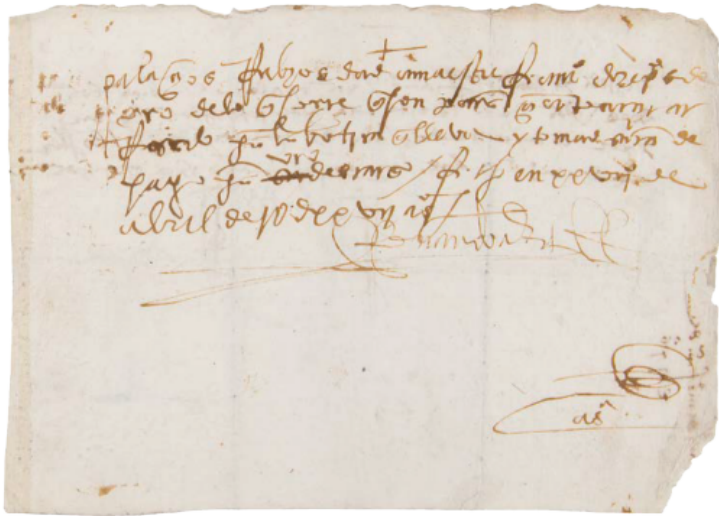
The presence of Los 1,500 has been felt heavily in communities throughout San Juan, with multiple members using illegal tactics to sustain the gang’s drug trafficking enterprise. FBI San Juan’s Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Force found that over an eight-year period, Los 1,500 saw significant financial gain and profit by distributing a plethora of drugs: heroin, cocaine base (crack), cocaine, marijuana, fentanyl, oxycodone (Percocet), and alprazolam (Xanax).

Gang members overtook abandoned apartments in public housing projects to prepare drugs for distribution at drug points across the island. And to keep control of their “territory” within these housing projects, the gang was known to intimidate and instill fear in members of the community—as well as housing administration and community leaders—including by resorting to violence. To further their drug trafficking criminal enterprise, which included distributing narcotics and transporting their profits, they bought stolen vehicles that were often obtained from carjackings. This resulted in a sustained increase in violent crime in the surrounding communities.



**“** Our agents and task force officers work to protect the most vulnerable citizens of Puerto Rico by locking up the most dangerous offenders.”

# FBI Returns 16th-Century Letter from Spanish Conquistador to Mexican Government



On July 19, the FBI returned a letter signed by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés to the government of Mexico. An investigation by the FBI Boston Division, in collaboration with our legal attaché office in Mexico City and our international partners, made the repatriation possible.

"We are incredibly honored to be able to assist in the return of this national treasure to the people of Mexico," said Christopher DiMenna, acting special agent in charge of the FBI Boston Division. "This manuscript, which is nearly five centuries old, preserves an important part of Mexico's history and reflects the FBI's ongoing commitment to protect cultural heritage, not only in the United States but around the world. The recovery of this priceless artifact is a direct result of our close and ongoing collaboration with the government of Mexico, and we are very thankful for their partnership."

According to Supervisory Special Agent Kristin Koch, who manages the FBI's Art Crime Program and led the FBI Boston Division's investigation, the letter dates back to April 1527. It was signed by Cortés, whose large-scale expedition from Spain to Mexico about eight years earlier eventually led to the downfall of the Aztec Empire.

Koch said the FBI authenticated the artifact through a process known as the mutual legal assistance treaty process, which allows "law enforcement authorities and prosecutors to obtain evidence, information, and testimony abroad in a form admissible in the courts of the Requesting State," according to the Department of Justice.



# FBI Director Christopher Wray Addresses Black Law Enforcement Executives on Role of Partnerships in Fighting Violent Crime, Other Threats

Wray also encouraged partners to share more data with the Bureau

In a meeting with Black law enforcement executives, FBI Director Christopher Wray reaffirmed the FBI's reliance on partner agencies like theirs to succeed in making the country safer from threats including violent crime, drugs, counterterrorism, and cybercrime.

"From where I sit, it would be nearly impossible to overstate just how critical partnerships are to really everything we do in today's threat environment," Wray said during a keynote address at the National Organization of Black Law

Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) Training Conference & Exhibition on July 24 in Cleveland.

Wray also stressed the value of data-sharing between our state and local partners and the FBI, which could improve the quality of crime reporting. He also underscored the importance of officer mental health and wellness and encouraged increased participation in the FBI's Law Enforcement Suicide Data Collection.



# FBI Director Lays Out Bureau's Stance on Artificial Intelligence at Cyber Threat Summit

Wray also explained how the FBI's FISA Section 702 authorities empower cyber efforts



During a July 26 keynote at the FBI Atlanta Cyber Threat Summit, Director Christopher Wray warned that cybercriminals are weaponizing artificial intelligence—and the resulting threat will only worsen as machine-learning models become increasingly sophisticated.

Wray also explained that the FBI's authorities under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, or FISA, enable our efforts to combat international cybercriminals. He identified 702-powered successes and stressed the urgency of reauthorizing that portion of the federal law.

Wray also discussed nation-state threats in cyberspace, noting that China, in particular, poses a formidable cyber threat, but Russia is not far behind.

Finally, he underscored the importance of public-private partnerships in securing the American people and economy from cyber threats.

"For 115 years—in fact, literally today—today is actually the FBI's birthday—the Bureau has been charged with protecting the American people and upholding the Constitution," he said. "And the men and women of the FBI work tirelessly every day to fulfill that mission—but we could not do it without partners—without partners like you," he said.

## The Weaponization of Artificial Intelligence

Director Wray recently said the FBI is examining ways it can use artificial intelligence to help support its mission, such as by "triaging and prioritizing the mountains of data we collect in our investigations."

But during the summit, he warned that bad actors are exploiting machine-learning models to commit crimes.

The same generative AI technologies that can be used to save people time by automating tasks can also be used to "generate deepfakes or malicious code," he said.

As an example, he explained one case in which a darknet user allegedly created malware using a generative AI program. Wray said the user "then instructed other cybercriminals on how to use it to recreate malware strains and techniques based on common variants."

"And that's really just the tip of the iceberg," he continued. "We assess that AI is going to enable threat actors to develop increasingly powerful, sophisticated, customizable, and scalable capabilities—and it's not going to take them long to do it."

Wray said that the Chinese government is particularly well-positioned to use the increasing powers of AI and machine learning against the United States, especially in conjunction with data it has stolen from the United States.



## Outreach and Mentorship: Cliff's Crew Visits the FBI

Organization introduces kids to diverse careers, experiences, and opportunities

On August 16, a group of youth mentored by retired NFL Seattle Seahawks player Cliff Avril visited the FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The group, known as Cliff's Crew, toured the FBI Experience and met with Associate Deputy Director Brian Turner.

Cliff's Crew, based in Seattle, Washington, aims to support the educational and health needs of youth locally and

abroad through representation, exposure, and education by introducing kids to diverse careers, experiences, and opportunities. The Crew consists of 10 Black youth who Avril meets with on a regular basis. Guest speakers from a variety of fields serve as role models and meet with Cliff's Crew to discuss their career paths and backgrounds as Black males.

The past two summers, Cliff's Crew has traveled to a different city to learn about the communities and unique histories of each place, as well as the role African-Americans have played in cities across the nation.

During the group's visit to Washington, D.C., they participated in The FBI Experience, which included a guided tour of the FBI Headquarters with interactive exhibits. Afterwards, ADD Turner joined the youth to discuss the FBI's mission and the importance of teamwork at the Bureau. He also answered questions from the Crew and shared words of wisdom and encouragement.



# FBI's Safe Online Surfing Internet Challenge

Free, educational program for children that teaches cyber safety updated with new graphics, interactive content



As a new school year begins, the FBI is refreshing its [Safe Online Surfing \(SOS\) Internet Challenge](https://sos.fbi.gov), an educational program that teaches students how to stay safe online and be good cyber citizens through a game-driven, age-appropriate curriculum.

The SOS program, created for students in third through eighth grades, covers topics like cyberbullying, passwords, malware, social media, and more. The program also provides teachers with a curriculum that meets state and federal internet safety mandates.

In the latest version of the program, students experience a more modern and mobile-responsive gaming experience as they make their way through the course. Most importantly, this update addresses and reflects the latest threats kids may face online.

"The Safe Online Surfing program is a great way for teachers and families to prepare students for their journey through cyberspace," said Ken Hoffman, who leads the FBI's national community outreach program. "The interactive platform helps

kids build a digital defense against predators and bullies while teaching them how to be responsible cyber citizens."

While taking the course, students guide a robot avatar through six thematic areas, answering true/false, multiple choice, and matching questions along the way. After completing all levels, students will take a final exam.

Since the program's launch in 2012, more than 1.6 million students have participated in the SOS challenge.

The SOS website and its activities are open year-round, both at home and in the classroom. The challenge opens on September 1 and runs through May. Each month during this timeframe, the classes with the top exam scores nationwide will receive an FBI-SOS certificate and, when possible, receive a congratulatory visit from FBI personnel.

To participate in the challenge, teachers must register their classes at [sos.fbi.gov](https://sos.fbi.gov). Teachers manage their students' participation in the program; the FBI does not collect or store any student information.

Learn more at [sos.fbi.gov](https://sos.fbi.gov).

# FBI, Partners Dismantle Qakbot Infrastructure in Multinational Cyber Takedown

Operation marks one of the largest-ever U.S.-led enforcement actions against a botnet

On August 29, the FBI and the Justice Department announced a multinational operation to disrupt and dismantle the malware and botnet known as Qakbot.

The action, which took place in the U.S., France, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Latvia, and the United Kingdom, represents one of the largest U.S.-led disruptions of a botnet infrastructure used by cybercriminals to commit ransomware, financial fraud, and other cyber-enabled criminal activity.

"The FBI neutralized this far-reaching criminal supply chain, cutting it off at the knees," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "The victims ranged from financial institutions on the East Coast to a critical infrastructure government contractor in the Midwest to a medical device manufacturer on the West Coast."

## How the Malware Worked

The Qakbot malware infected victim computers primarily through spam emails that contained malicious attachments or links.

After a user downloaded or clicked the content, Qakbot delivered additional malware—including ransomware—to their computer. The computer also became part of a botnet (a network of compromised computers) and could be controlled remotely by botnet users. All the while, a Qakbot victim was typically unaware that their computer had been infected.

Since its creation in 2008, Qakbot malware has been used in ransomware attacks and other cybercrimes that caused hundreds of millions of dollars in losses to individuals and businesses in the U.S. and abroad.

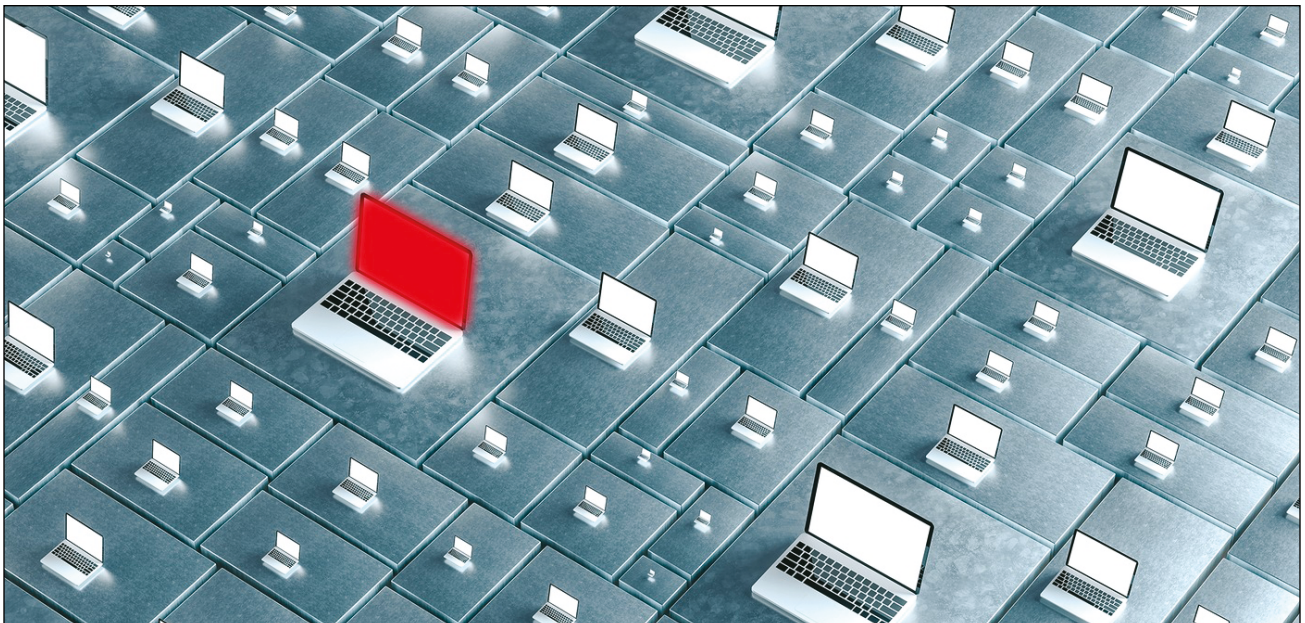
"This botnet provided cybercriminals like these with a command-and-control infrastructure consisting of hundreds of thousands of computers used to carry out attacks against individuals and businesses all around the globe," Wray said.

## Disrupting the Duck

As part of the operation, the FBI gained lawful access to Qakbot's infrastructure and identified over 700,000 infected computers worldwide—including more than 200,000 in the U.S.

To disrupt the botnet, the FBI redirected Qakbot traffic to Bureau-controlled servers that instructed infected computers to download an uninstaller file. This uninstaller—created to remove the Qakbot malware—untethered infected computers from the botnet and prevented the installation of any additional malware.

"All of this was made possible by the dedicated work of FBI Los Angeles, our Cyber Division at FBI Headquarters, and our partners, both here at home and overseas," said Wray. "The cyber threat facing our nation is growing more dangerous and complex every day. But our success proves that our own network and our own capabilities are more powerful."





## Lending a Hand in Lahaina

FBI teams gathered on Maui to assist with wildfire recovery efforts

When a wildfire devastated the island of Maui on August 8, killing at least 97 people and destroying more than 2,000 homes, the FBI was quick to offer assistance to our law enforcement partners in Hawaii.

Driving through Lahaina the next day, special agents from the FBI's resident agency on Maui saw surreal scenes of melted cars and traffic lights. Boats anchored 100 yards offshore burned in Lahaina's harbor. It's estimated the fire's temperature reached 1700 degrees Fahrenheit.

"I'd never been through something like that before," said one agent. "Lahaina was such a vibrant, colorful place. Everything was in grayscale. Even the water was black."

FBI Honolulu immediately contacted Maui law enforcement to see what help was needed. The relationships the Bureau has with local partners were strong to begin with, which helped efforts immensely. The Maui Police Department (PD) invited the FBI to a briefing at the county's Emergency Operations Center.

Some initial concerns facing Maui PD were maintaining a perimeter around the search and rescue area—where active fires were still burning—and supporting the county's morgue and evidence response team, which were quickly becoming inundated with remains of the deceased.

Within days of the fire, FBI resources such as the Evidence Response Team (ERT), forensic identification, and victim services deployed to Lahaina. FBI Honolulu Division's professional support staff provided resources to support Maui PD and the FBI throughout the response.

// We worked closely with other local agencies. This was definitely a team effort."



# Operation Not Forgotten

## Initiative surged resources to support women and children in Indigenous communities

The Operation Not Forgotten initiative, along with the FBI's broader Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) strategy, emphasizes the FBI's continued dedication to addressing the violence impacting Indigenous communities. When the initiative was announced, agents from across the Bureau volunteered for temporary assignments in Indian Country.

On the Yakama Reservation, Agent Kay worked on a range of investigations, including those related to homicide, missing persons, gangs, and crimes against children.

"You might not work these kinds of violations anywhere else in the FBI," he said. "For agents working in Indian Country, it's the closest thing to being a local police detective."

In one investigation, Kay tried to locate a child sexual assault victim to see if they would be pressing charges. He and a Yakama Police detective met to share updates on the case and went together to the interview. Unfortunately, the victim wasn't home, so Kay left his phone number and hoped for a call back. He also drove around the reservation hoping to find the victim before heading back to the FBI office in Yakama.

The assignment to Indian Country has been eye-opening, Kay said. It's given him an opportunity to work closely with Native American partners in a part of the country where the mission is critical.

There are multiple tribal detectives Kay now works with regularly, having quickly established a rapport. "You investigate crime scenes, generate leads, conduct interviews, and make arrests," Kay said. "All of this is done in partnership with the tribal and local law enforcement."



**//** You might not work these kinds of violations anywhere else in the FBI."





## Director Wray Addresses IACP

“Our partnerships are stronger than they’ve ever been”

Director Christopher Wray reaffirmed the FBI’s commitment to work collaboratively with its law enforcement partners and insisted the close relationships “in these challenging times” are essential to fighting crime and protecting the American people against an array of threats.

Speaking in October at the annual International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conference in San Diego, Wray underscored the importance of leveraging collective resources and strengths to better protect our communities.

Wray praised a “spirit of cooperation” and a shared mission with the IACP that remains close today, going back to the Bureau’s creation 115 years ago.

With the world’s attention drawn to the crisis unfolding in the Middle East, he also offered condolences to the people of Israel and the innocent lives lost at the hands of Hamas.

Wray described the targeting of a community because of its faith as “totally unacceptable” and said the FBI remains committed to confronting such threats, both in the United States and overseas.

“In this heightened environment, there’s no question we’re seeing an increase in reported threats,” he said, urging partners to stay vigilant and continue sharing any intelligence or observations.



# FBI Director Convenes Five Eyes Summit on Protecting Innovation, Preventing Economic Espionage

## Historic gathering marks first-ever joint public appearance of Five Eyes leaders

During an October 17 fireside chat with intelligence chiefs from across the Five Eyes partnership, FBI Director Christopher Wray called the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) the foremost threat to global innovation and suggested that partnerships are the best way to fight back.

“There is no greater threat to innovation than the Chinese government, and it is a measure of how seriously the five of us and our services take that threat that we have chosen to come together to try to highlight that, raise awareness, raise resilience, and work closely with the private sector to try to build better protection for innovation—especially in a place like Northern California, but, really, across all five of our countries,” Wray said during the discussion, which was moderated by former U.S. Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

The conversation was part of the Bureau’s Emerging Technology and Securing Innovation Security Summit in California’s Silicon Valley. Wray convened the summit to shed light on the threat of innovation theft—especially by China—and to help researchers and industry players prevent their intellectual property and technology from being stolen or exploited.

The summit consisted of a fireside chat, a joint press conference with the international agency chiefs, and closed-door discussions with these leaders and partners from the private and research sectors about the threats posed by China and emerging technologies.

It also marked the first-ever public gathering of leaders from the Five Eyes—a coalition made up of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The partnership grew from the 1946 BRUSA agreement, shortly after the end of World War II, to share intelligence and coordinate security efforts. The five member countries have a long history of trust and cooperation, and they share a commitment to common values.

Throughout the summit, Wray reiterated the Bureau’s commitment to collaborating with Five Eyes and private sector partners to safeguard emerging technologies from theft and exploitation—including the potential misuse of artificial intelligence.





## "A Different World Now"

### Osage discussion spotlights positive relationship between FBI and Native Americans

The special agent in charge of the FBI's Oklahoma City Field Office joined local Native American leaders and the author of a best-selling book about murders on the Osage Nation a century ago for a panel discussion about crime, greed, justice, and the relationship today between the Bureau and Oklahoma's many Indigenous tribes.

The discussion on October 17 at Oklahoma Christian University featured David Grann, author of "Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI," a historical account of the so-called Reign of Terror in Oklahoma in the early 1920s.

Tribal leaders Geoffrey Standing Bear, principal chief of the Osage Nation, and Governor Bill Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation, along with the FBI's Edward Gray, joined the author in recounting a long string of murders in Osage County and how the FBI got involved in the investigation.

At the time, Osage territory sat atop huge oil deposits, making enrolled members of the Osage Nation some of the world's wealthiest people per capita—and a target for criminals.

"Unquestionably, greed was the driving force. But I would say there was another deeper force at work than just greed," said Grann, whose 2017 book has been turned into a feature film. "For these systemic crimes to have taken place, greed was fused together with a dehumanization of another people. The perpetrators did not look upon their targets as fully embodied humans with souls and dignity."

In the early days of the Bureau of Investigation—which became the FBI—a young J. Edgar Hoover saw the importance of this case for the Bureau to investigate and solve. The FBI has special jurisdiction to investigate violent



crimes on Native American land through the federal Major Crimes Act.

"The FBI is not new in this game," said Special Agent in Charge Gray. "We've been prioritizing crimes against Native Americans for a very long time."

Investigating these crimes, however, can't be accomplished by the FBI alone. The Bureau relies on established partnerships with Native American law enforcement agencies to bring cases to a close. The FBI has 22 Safe Trails Task Forces with over 150 agents investigating crimes committed on about 200 reservations nationwide.

When the panel's moderator suggested the FBI and other federal agencies may still be greeted with suspicion by tribal communities—since federal laws created many of the difficult conditions on reservations—the Osage Nation's Standing Bear chimed in.

"Things have changed, thank God," said Standing Bear, whose tribe has over 20,000 registered members and about

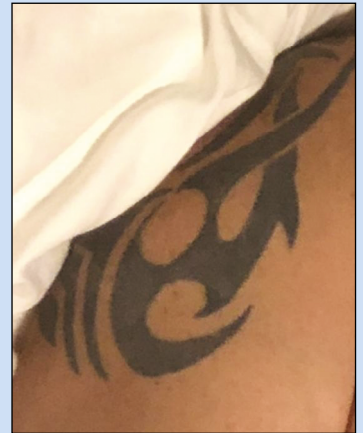
6,800 still living in the Osage Nation's territory in Northern Oklahoma. "We have a working relationship with the FBI and our police. Osage Nation Police works on cases, joint investigations with the FBI. It's a different world now."

Bill Anoatubby, governor of the Chickasaw Nation, agreed.

"It's a mutual respect," he said. "They're there to help us. We need them. So, it's important to have them around. And they've helped us over the years on many, many cases."

Gray said the relationship between Native American tribal leaders and law enforcement is stronger than ever before.

The FBI, he said, will be "in the community, working these crimes with rigor, with the tenacity and the professionalism from the start, and building that trust in the community."



## Wilver Villegas-Palomino Added to FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List

U.S. Department of State Narcotics  
Rewards Program offering up to  
\$5 million

In April, the FBI announced the addition of Wilver Villegas-Palomino to its Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list.

Villegas-Palomino is a ranking member of the National Liberation Army or Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), a transnational criminal organization and foreign terrorist organization. The U.S. Department of State Narcotics Rewards Program is offering up to \$5 million for information leading to his arrest and/or his conviction.

Villegas-Palomino directs the ELN Northeastern War Front (ELN-NEWF), one of six regional ELN war fronts that control the Catatumbo area of Colombia and Venezuela. The ELN-NEWF oversees multiple laboratories that collectively produce an estimated 200 tons of cocaine annually that are transported worldwide.

The ELN uses proceeds from Villegas-Palomino's drug trafficking enterprise to fund terrorist attacks, launch sabotage operations, buy political influence, and engage in other malign activities designed to destabilize government institutions and subvert U.S. national security and law enforcement interests in the region.

A federal arrest warrant was issued for Villegas-Palomino in the U.S. District Court, Southern District of Texas, Houston Division, on February 13, 2020, after he was charged with narcoterrorism, international cocaine distribution conspiracy, and international cocaine distribution.

MORE AT [FBI.GOV/VILLEGAS-PALOMINO-WANTED](https://www.fbi.gov/villegas-palomino-wanted)

## Donald Eugene Fields II Added to Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List

FBI offering up to \$250,000 for  
information leading to his capture

The FBI announced the addition of Donald Eugene Fields II to its Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list on May 25, 2023.

Fields is wanted for the alleged sex trafficking of at least one child in Missouri between approximately 2013 and 2017. A federal arrest warrant was issued for Fields on December 8, 2022, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri after he was charged with sex trafficking of children.

According to a special agent in the FBI's St. Louis Division, "Fields has allegedly demonstrated a pattern of abusing minor females in his circle that are entrusted to his care, manipulating them to earn their trust quickly and using their own resources to take advantage of them."

MORE AT [FBI.GOV/FIELDSWANTED](https://www.fbi.gov/fieldswanted)

## Vitel'Homme Innocent Added to FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List

U.S. Department of State  
Transnational Organized Crime  
Rewards Program offering up to  
\$2 million

The FBI, along with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of State, added Vitel'Homme Innocent to its Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list on November 15, 2023.

Vitel'Homme is a Haitian national and leader of the Kraze Barye gang, which operates in the Torcelle and Tabarre areas of Haiti and actively participates in kidnappings for ransom, extortion, and car thefts.

In October 2021, Kraze Barye and the 400 Mawozo gang allegedly kidnapped 16 U.S. citizens serving as Christian missionaries near Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The group included five children, including one as young as 8 months old. The hostages were allegedly held at gunpoint and most remained captive for 61 days before escaping. Vitel'Homme was charged for his role in the conspiracy along with other gang leaders on November 7, 2022.

In addition, on October 7, 2022, Vitel'Homme allegedly ordered gang members to kidnap two U.S. citizens from their home in Haiti. Armed gang members allegedly forced entry into the victims' residence and attempted to kidnap them. During the kidnapping, the gang members allegedly shot and killed one of the victims. The other victim was taken into captivity and held hostage at an undisclosed location in Haiti, while Vitel'Homme participated in ransom negotiations in exchange for the victim's release. On October 28, 2022, the gang released the remaining victim after the victim's family paid ransom payments. A second indictment was unsealed on October 24, 2023, charging Vitel'Homme for his alleged role in the kidnapping.

MORE AT [FBI.GOV/VITELINNOCENTWANTED](https://www.fbi.gov/vitelinnocentwanted)

# Complete Story List

The following provides a list of and links to all stories published on [fbi.gov/stories](https://www.fbi.gov/stories) from December 7, 2022, to November 15, 2023.

## [Vitel'Homme Innocent Added to FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List](#)

November 15, 2023

The FBI, along with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia and the U.S. Department of State, announced the addition of Vitel'Homme Innocent to its Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list. A reward of up to \$2 million is being offered for information leading to his arrest and/or conviction.

## [Osage Discussion Spotlights Relationship Between FBI and Native Americans](#)

October 23, 2023

The special agent in charge of the FBI's Oklahoma City Field Office joined local Native American leaders and the author of a best-selling book about murders on the Osage Nation a century ago for a panel discussion in Oklahoma.

## [Update: FBI Helps Recover Nearly 200 Bodies from Colorado Funeral Home](#)

October 20, 2023

On November 8, 2023, Jon Hallford and Carie Hallford, owners of Return to Nature Funeral Home, were arrested on suspicion of committing crimes related to abuse of a corpse, felony, money laundering, and forgery.

## [FBI Director Convenes Five Eyes Summit on Protecting Innovation, Preventing Economic Espionage](#)

October 18, 2023

During an October 17 fireside chat with intelligence chiefs from across the Five Eyes partnership, FBI Director Christopher Wray called the Chinese Communist Party the foremost threat to global innovation and suggested that partnerships are the best way to fight back.

## [Director Wray Addresses IACP](#)

October 14, 2023

At an annual conference held by the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Director Christopher Wray reaffirmed the FBI's commitment to work collaboratively with its law enforcement partners and insisted the close relationships are essential to fighting crime and protecting the American people against an array of threats.

## [Antioch and Pittsburg Police Officers Charged with Public Corruption Crimes](#)

October 5, 2023

As the result of an FBI investigation, a combination of 10 current and former officers and employees from the Antioch and Pittsburg (California) police departments were charged with multiple crimes.

## [Operation Not Forgotten](#)

September 29, 2023

An FBI initiative known as Operation Not Forgotten detailed 40 special agents, intelligence analysts, staff operational specialists, and victim specialists to 10 FBI field offices whose designated regions support women and children in Indigenous communities. During the resource surge, investigators handled over 220 cases.

## [Indian Country Onboarding Program](#)

September 29, 2023

The Indian Country Onboarding Program develops agents to operate with more autonomy and survivability and a more comprehensive investigative technique while working in Native American communities.

## [Lending a Hand in Lahaina](#)

September 27, 2023

When a wildfire devastated the island of Maui, the FBI was quick to offer assistance to our law enforcement partners in Hawaii.

## [FBI Director Christopher Wray Speaks at 2023 mWISE Cybersecurity Conference](#)

September 18, 2023

FBI Director Wray reaffirmed the FBI's stance on countering AI and cyberspace threats and posed a call to action to strengthen private sector and government partnerships in fighting both domestic and foreign adversaries.

## [Emergency Preparedness Exercise Tests Response to Radiological Attack](#)

September 14, 2023

The FBI hosted an interagency effort designed to coordinate roles and responsibilities in case of a weapons of mass destruction terrorist attack.

## [Director Wray Discusses National Security Threats at International Spy Museum Event](#)

September 8, 2023

FBI Director Christopher Wray participated in a wide-ranging discussion with International Spy Museum Executive Director Chris Costa about national security threats facing the United States and what the FBI is doing to combat them.

## [Tornado Cash Co-Founders Accused of Helping Cybercriminals Launder Stolen Crypto](#)

September 7, 2023

Two men who helped create a service that blurs cryptocurrency transaction histories are facing federal charges after they allegedly conspired to launder money for DPRK-sponsored criminal actors, violate U.S. government sanctions, and operate an unlicensed money transmitting business.

### **FBI, Partners Dismantle Qakbot Infrastructure in Multinational Cyber Takedown**

August 29, 2023

The FBI and the Justice Department announced a multinational operation to disrupt and dismantle the malware and botnet known as Qakbot.

### **Safe Online Surfing Launching for 2023-2024 School Year**

August 23, 2023

The FBI has refreshed its Safe Online Surfing (SOS) Internet Challenge—a free, educational program for children that teaches cyber safety—with new graphics and updated content.

### **Outreach and Mentorship: Cliff's Crew Visits the FBI**

August 18, 2023

On August 16, a group of youth mentored by retired NFL Seattle Seahawks player Cliff Avril visited the FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The group, known as Cliff's Crew, toured the FBI Experience and met with Associate Deputy Director Brian Turner.

### **FBI Internship Program Gives Wounded Warriors a Window into Bureau Careers**

August 2, 2023

A unique FBI internship program gives our nation's wounded warriors the chance to explore careers with the Bureau—and potentially become permanent members of the FBI family.

### **FBI-Led Sweep Targeting Sex Traffickers Recovers Dozens of Minor Victims**

August 1, 2023

The FBI-led Operation Cross Country located 59 minor victims of child sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, and another 59 children who had been reported missing.

### **FBI Director Lays Out Bureau's Stance on Artificial Intelligence at Cyber Threat Summit**

July 26, 2023

During a July 26 keynote at the FBI Atlanta Cyber Threat Summit, Director Christopher Wray warned that cybercriminals are weaponizing artificial intelligence—and the resulting threat will only worsen as machine-learning models become increasingly sophisticated.

### **FBI Director Addresses Black Law Enforcement Executives on Role of Partnerships in Fighting Violent Crime, Other Threats**

July 24, 2023

In a July 24 meeting with Black law enforcement executives, FBI Director Christopher Wray reaffirmed the FBI's reliance on partner agencies like theirs to succeed in making the country safer from threats including violent crime, drugs, counterterrorism, and cybercrime.

### **FBI Returns 16th-Century Letter from Spanish Conquistador to Mexican Government**

July 20, 2023

After an investigation by the FBI Boston Division—in collaboration with our legal attaché office in Mexico City and our international partners—the FBI returned a letter signed by Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés to the government of Mexico.

### **Director Wray Champions FBI Before House Judiciary Committee**

July 12, 2023

FBI Director Christopher Wray testified on July 12 before the House Judiciary Committee about the breadth and impact of the work FBI employees do each day to protect the American people.

### **Combating Violence on the Streets of San Juan**

July 11, 2023

FBI San Juan and law enforcement partners led a violent-gang takedown that resulted in drug and firearm charges for 40 gang members.

### **Navajo Victim Specialist Shows How Role is Key to Supporting Crime Victims, Investigations**

June 5, 2023

A Navajo victim specialist in the FBI's Phoenix Division shows how her background is an asset for Native American crime victims and investigators pursuing leads.

### **FBI Program Graduates Pay It Forward as Outreach Specialists**

June 2, 2023

Teen Academy graduate Bella Crepeaux and Citizens Academy graduate Jay Mroszczak are now paying it forward as the next generation of FBI community outreach specialists.

### **FBI Increases Ten Most Wanted Fugitives Reward**

May 25, 2023

The FBI has announced that the reward for information leading directly to the arrest of a Ten Most Wanted Fugitive increased from up to \$100,000 to up to \$250,000.

### **Donald Eugene Fields II Added to FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List**

May 25, 2023

Donald Eugene Fields II, wanted for the alleged sex trafficking of at least one child in Missouri, has been added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list. The FBI is offering up to \$250,000 for information leading to his arrest.

### **National Missing Children's Day 2023**

May 23, 2023

In recognition of National Missing Children's Day—observed annually on May 25—the FBI reaffirms its year-round commitment to reuniting missing and kidnapped children with their families and asks the public for help in bringing them home.

### [\*\*Elder Fraud Task Force Targets Grandparent Scams\*\*](#)

May 19, 2023

An Elder Justice Task Force in California illustrates how collaboration between agencies is critical in targeting financial scams against older Americans that cost them billions in losses every year.

### [\*\*FBI Honors Fallen During 2023 Police Week Events\*\*](#)

May 15, 2023

As part of a series of events honoring law enforcement personnel who have died in the line of duty, the FBI recognized the sacrifices of its partners and honored its own fallen.

### [\*\*Tribal Community Event in Arizona Illustrates FBI Role in MMIP Initiative\*\*](#)

May 5, 2023

The family of a missing Native American recently attended an event sponsored by FBI Phoenix that offered support and resources to relatives of missing or murdered Indigenous persons.

### [\*\*Operation SpecTor Targets Darknet Markets\*\*](#)

May 2, 2023

A coordinated operation spanning nine countries targeting darknet drug markets culminated in seizures of more than \$50 million and millions of potentially lethal pills.

### [\*\*Victim Specialists Support American Indian and Alaska Native Communities\*\*](#)

April 24, 2023

Five victim specialists who support American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities reflect on their experiences.

### [\*\*Wilver Villegas-Palomino Added to FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives List\*\*](#)

April 14, 2023

Wilver Villegas-Palomino, a ranking ELN member, has been added to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list. The State Department Narcotics Rewards Program is offering up to \$5 million for information leading to his arrest and/or conviction.

### [\*\*Boston Marathon Bombing Anniversary\*\*](#)

April 13, 2023

Leading up to the 10-year anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing, FBI Boston held a remembrance event to honor victims and recall responders' heroic efforts.

### [\*\*FBI Launches Stolen Art App\*\*](#)

April 10, 2023

Art enthusiasts, collectors, and law enforcement can now search the FBI's National Stolen Art File app.

### [\*\*USERT: Tools of the Trade\*\*](#)

April 6, 2023

Peer into the Underwater Search and Evidence Response Team (USERT) toolbox to see how everyday items and specialized equipment help the team process a scene.

### [\*\*FBI's Underwater Search and Evidence Response Team, Part 3\*\*](#)

April 6, 2023

This is the third part of a series giving you an inside look at USERT—from its rigorous training to the tools of the trade.

### [\*\*FBI Takes 30x30 Pledge to Recruit More Women Agents, Police\*\*](#)

March 27, 2023

The FBI is participating in the 30x30 Initiative, a push to recruit more female sworn law enforcement officers and to empower them professionally.

### [\*\*FBI's Underwater Search and Evidence Response Team, Part 2\*\*](#)

March 13, 2023

This is the second part of a series giving you an inside look at USERT—from its rigorous training to the tools of the trade.

### [\*\*Stolen Art Returned to Iraq\*\*](#)

March 9, 2023

The FBI returned a 2,700-year-old artifact to the government of Iraq that is believed to have been stolen during the pillaging of the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in 2003.

### [\*\*FBI Edges U.S. Secret Service in Charity Hockey Game\*\*](#)

March 6, 2023

The FBI defeated hockey rivals the U.S. Secret Service at an annual charity game between the two agencies.

### [\*\*FBI's Underwater Search and Evidence Response Team, Part 1\*\*](#)

February 16, 2023

This is the first part of a series where you'll get an inside look at USERT—from their rigorous training to tools of the trade.

### [\*\*Chinese High-Altitude Balloon Recovery\*\*](#)

February 9, 2023

The FBI is serving as the lead governing agency for the forensic examination of the Chinese high-altitude balloon identified and shot down February 5 by the U.S. military off the coast of South Carolina.

### [\*\*Director Wray Meets with Sheriffs to Discuss Partnerships, Progress, and Challenges\*\*](#)

February 9, 2023

FBI Director Christopher Wray recently met with representatives of the nation's leading sheriff's organizations to reaffirm the FBI's commitment to strong partnerships and to discuss the myriad challenges facing law enforcement agencies.

### [\*\*National Academy Class Rallies to Support Texas Boy's Goal\*\*](#)

December 7, 2022

With more than 50 agencies in attendance, the class helped an 11-year-old from Pearland, Texas, get closer to his goal of being sworn in by 758 law enforcement agencies.

**FBI OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, D.C. 20535

