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AIRTIME



Nolan Martin skates at Lafayette Park in Fall River on Nov. 17. COLIN FURZE/HERALD NEWS

After long shortage, Fall River police near full staffing

Nick Rommel
The Herald News | USA TODAY NETWORK

Seventeen years after historic budget cuts depleted its ranks, the Fall River Police Department is getting closer to the staffing levels its leadership says it needs.

"I think we're in a great place now," said interim Police Chief J.T. Hoar.

Eleven prospective Fall River police officers graduated from the Plymouth Police Academy at a Nov. 13 ceremony in Plymouth's Memorial Hall. Another 11 officers were sworn into the department in May 2026.

"We anticipate reaching our full complement of officers within the next year," read the caption to a hiring video posted by FRPD on Nov. 11.

Hoar said the department has 168 officers. Counting planned retirements and current academy classes, he projects that number to reach just under 180 next year. He said the goal is 188 officers, not counting supervisors.

The department has struggled with staffing since 2009, when a global economic recession forced Massachusetts and Fall River into budget cuts that led to 53 patrolmen being laid off. While some of those officers were rehired in the following months and years, Hoar said the department has "been chasing that deficit all this time."

If the department's 53 supervisors are added to its target of 188 patrol officers, total staffing would roughly equal the roster of 235 the department enjoyed before 2009 cuts.

The department has not had more than 173 patrol officers since at least 2018, according to staffing data compiled by The Herald News.

In 2023 and 2024, the department saw a significant staffing slump that police chiefs attributed to several factors: a wave of retirements, social attitudes about policing, lacking physical fitness in new applicants. In 2025, former Police Chief Kelly Furtado also said the

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Trafficking hidden in plain sight

Delaware police uncover coercion, exploitation inside massage businesses

Isabel Hughes
Delaware News Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

WILMINGTON, DE – One by one, the women emerged from Crystal Spa, north of Wilmington, and into public view. Each tried to shield her body as police escorted her out the front door.

This wasn't how the women typically exited the massage business – if they left at all.

For weeks, they had lived behind the lobby's drawn blinds, hidden in windowless back rooms connected by a dim hallway. One room held a single mattress atop a particle-board platform. Three pillows, one for each woman, rested against the wall. Another room served as a kitchen. A third was a shower area, where a plastic storage bin held the faucet.

The remaining rooms were for massages. And for sex.

From 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week, the women waited for the next man to walk in. The business averaged eight to 15 buyers per day, they told investigators. Sometimes, police surveillance showed, the men arrived as soon as the doors opened.

Days off were rare, sick days nonexistent. But on a hot Wednesday morning in mid-July, this usual schedule was disrupted. Crystal Spa was being shut down.

The Foulk Road raid by New Castle County Police was the latest in a growing effort by the department to target illicit massage businesses, where investigators say sex and labor trafficking is rampant.

After decades of happy ending jokes that reduced massage "parlors" to a punchline, investigators are approaching these businesses differently.

In the little more than a year since New Castle County Police formed its drug and human trafficking unit, detectives have targeted more than half a dozen of these establishments.

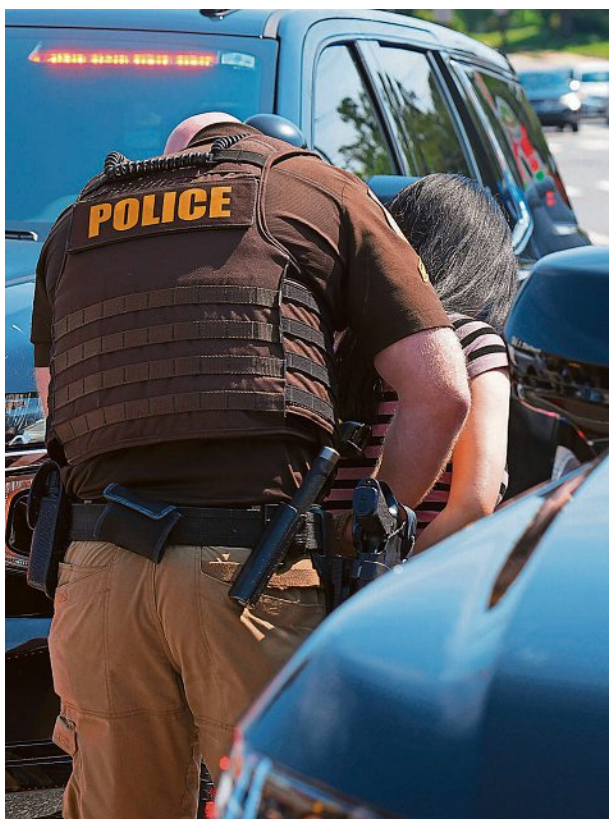
What they have found bears little resemblance to the human trafficking many Americans imagine.

These aren't children or teens. There are no ropes binding their wrists and ankles. The women aren't victims of parking-lot kidnappings.

Instead, trafficking in Delaware often looks like Crystal Spa – unremarkable storefronts tucked between legitimate businesses in suburban strip malls.

Behind neon "open" signs, women are forced to eat, sleep and work. The same rooms that serve as their homes become the places men arrive to buy sex – and oftentimes, experts say, take it forcibly.

Some women remain at one business for years. Many others are moved from parlor to parlor, repeating the same cycle in a different strip mall, either in Delaware or elsewhere across the nation.



Police escorted several suspected victims of human trafficking during a raid at the Crystal Spa before it was shut down in 2026. Detectives are increasingly looking for charges they can prove from massage business raids without relying solely on victim testimony. DAMIAN GILETTO/DELAWARE NEWS JOURNAL FILE

No chains needed

There is no clear count of these businesses.

One national anti-trafficking organization, The Network, estimated 41 illicit massage businesses were operating in Delaware in 2024. The same year, it identified more than 17,000 across the United States – more locations than there are McDonald's restaurants.

But no one really knows, in large part because these businesses are, inherently, illicit.

Some locations are licensed, even if the workers themselves don't have the proper credentials. Others don't have any licenses at all.

Still, simply offering unlicensed massages – or even selling sex – doesn't equate to human trafficking.

Under both Delaware and federal law, force, fraud or coercion must occur for commercial sex work in adults to be considered trafficking. In several businesses raided by New Castle County Police, investigators say they've found at least one of those elements.

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Lawsuit says Gabriel House owner sold leaky, unsafe condo

Dan Medeiros
The Herald News | USA TODAY NETWORK

FALL RIVER – A homeowner on Brightman Street has filed a lawsuit against former Gabriel House assisted living facility owner Dennis Etzkorn, claiming he sold her a condominium that leaks and is infested with mold and termites.

According to filings in Bristol County Superior Court, Francia Toussaint of 160 Brightman St. has sued Etzkorn and one of his corporations, Detyga LLC, alleging the condo she bought from him turned out to be a lemon.

Toussaint claims Etzkorn and Detyga "used cosmetic wall-to-wall carpeting and toxic waterproofing 'Drylock' masonry paint to intentionally conceal massive, pre-existing structural envelope failures, rotted bedroom subfloors, and active foundation cracking" from her, home inspectors and the mortgage company.

She also claims the building has a "dangerous, unpermitted wiring shell" that could cost more than $17,400 to fix.

Demand letters sent to an attorney for Etzkorn and Detyga in 2025 and 2026 request $125,000 to settle all claims due to repairs she's had to make, breach of contract, negligence, property damage and more.

Responses from Etzkorn's attorney included in the filing defended the company against the claims and

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