

FBI in Buffalo on 2019, Child Exploitation Task Force

 [wkbw.com/news/local-news/fbi-in-buffalo-on-2019-child-exploitation-task-force](https://www.wkbw.com/news/local-news/fbi-in-buffalo-on-2019-child-exploitation-task-force)

By: Nikki DeMentri

January 4, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — During 2019 in Western New York, several arrests of teachers, coaches and guidance counselors grabbed the headlines with charges surrounding child exploitation and child pornography.

"You know it's as personal as it gets. All we want as a parent is to protect our children and when we feel like we didn't, it feels like a failure," Kelly Hall said.

She's a City Honors parent here in Buffalo. Her daughter had Peter Hingston for class. The same teacher arrested and charged in September on sex crimes. Hall's been outspoken, but knows this issue reaches far beyond her daughter's school.

"It worries me because it seems so prevalent nowadays and that's what we're hearing about," she said.

The Child Exploitation Task Force here in Buffalo has been investigating these types of crimes for 20 plus years. Although it cannot speak to specific cases, it says "several impactful arrests" were made in the last few months.

"We're getting better at doing our jobs. We're getting better at understanding technology. We're getting better at identifying who these folks are and actually catching them," Assistant Special Agent in Charge Robert Guyton said.

The last two years or so, the task force has put a focus on those in a position of trust -- like coaches, teacher and counselors. But stresses, it will still investigate others who exploit children.

"We're successfully prosecuting these guys and holding them accountable because of the partnerships that we have with the schools, local law enforcement," Cheektowaga Police detective and Task Force Officer Michael Hockwater said.

According to the FBI, it's not realistic to compare the number of those arrested for these crimes in 2019 to say 2010 since case investigation have evolved.

"Children are our biggest asset here and we just want to make sure that they stay safe," Guyton said. He added whether it's through education of awareness, it is important to empower your child.

"I'd rather be on the conservative side and listen to a child and vet that out than just not listen to them and have that be something that we missed," he said.