



Department of Justice

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U.S. ATTORNEY JOE HOGSETT ANNOUNCES “SEXTORTION” CHARGES AGAINST INDIANAPOLIS MAN

*Defendant allegedly victimized nearly a dozen local minors, faces prosecution
as part of ongoing Operation Community Watch*

PRESS RELEASE

INDIANAPOLIS – U.S. Attorney Joseph H. Hogsett announced this afternoon that federal charges have been filed against Austin Williams, age 23, of Indianapolis, alleging that he engaged in a year-long pattern of “sextortion” and sexual assault targeting minor females in the Indianapolis area. The fourteen count criminal complaint includes allegations that the defendant distributed and received child pornography, coerced local minors into sexually explicit conduct, and used “sextortion” techniques against his victims. It is also alleged that Williams sexually assaulted at least one of his victims.

“This case is more than a warning to young people that there are dangers online,” said Hogsett. “It is also a warning to those who would engage in such behavior that you cannot hide, and you are not truly anonymous – these predators will be found, and will be brought to justice.”

The criminal complaint alleges that on January 24, 2013, Austin Williams was arrested by the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department and charged with the rape of a fifteen year old victim in Indianapolis. In executing a search warrant as part of their investigation, IMPD investigators searched the defendant’s residence and located a cellular telephone. A search of that phone revealed hundreds of sexually explicit images depicting female minors.

A full forensic examination of the phone allegedly revealed that Williams had been engaging in a pattern of “sextortion” that targeted young women in the Indianapolis-area. Using fraudulent Facebook accounts that portrayed Williams as a young woman, the defendant would make contact with local female minors and attempt to elicit sexually explicit images from them by offering to “trade” self-made images. Often, Williams would obtain the telephone number of his victims, urging them via text messages to produce explicit images and videos of themselves.

Once these images or videos were produced and sent to the defendant, it is alleged that he would in many instances begin “sextorting” the minors, posting the images on Facebook or threatening to do so. The victims would then be told that the only way to keep these images from being distributed to their friends and family would be through the creation of new images and videos for the defendant.

Through the use of these techniques, the defendant was allegedly able in many instances to coerce his victims into repeatedly exploiting themselves. In one troubling incident, it is alleged that the defendant continued to post images of a victim online even after she complied with the defendant’s requests. The victim was so distraught that she attempted suicide.

In addition, a number of victims were allegedly tricked into meeting up with the defendant, who they were told was a “brother” or “boyfriend” of the young woman they believed they were communicating with online. It is alleged that during these meetings, Williams would attempt to sexually assault the victims, or would actually engage in illicit sexual activity with them. In the case of his final alleged victim, it is alleged that Williams followed a fifteen year old female home after one of these arranged meetings, raping the victim outside her home.

As a result of an investigation into Austin Williams, at least ten minor females have been identified as alleged victims. It is alleged that all of them either: were enticed or persuaded by Williams to produce child pornography, received child pornography from Williams, or were persuaded or coerced into engaging in illicit sexual activity with the defendant.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven D. DeBrotta, who is prosecuting the case for the government, Austin faces a minimum of fifteen years and a maximum of thirty years in federal prison, on many of the counts, if he is convicted. The defendant also faces lifetime supervised release and registration as a sexual offender.

This prosecution comes as Hogsett has announced a comprehensive crackdown on child exploitation in Indiana. In January 2013, he launched “Operation Community Watch,” which allows prosecutors and investigators to use cutting-edge techniques to identify and charge people in Hoosier communities who are engaged in the receipt and trafficking of child pornography materials.

In this case, these efforts were facilitated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Indianapolis Safe Streets Task Force, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, the Marion County Prosecutor’s Office, and the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

This case was also brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Hogsett pointed out that in the last Project Safe Childhood reporting year, the Office prosecuted 52 defendants, an increase of 37% over the prior year, and 49 defendants were convicted and sentenced. These are all-time records for the Office. The Office conviction rate for PSC cases was 100%, a level it has been at since 1991.

The greatest measure of the PSC program's impact, however, is the identification and rescue of child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Over the last year, the U.S. Attorney's Office successfully identified more than 120 child victims, including minors in Indiana, numerous places in the United States, Canada, Switzerland, and other countries around the world.

Led nationally by United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

A criminal complaint is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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