



Department of Justice

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**FLORIDA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO
TRANSPORTING A MINOR TO ALABAMA FOR SEX**

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA— William Joe Mitchell, 48, of Jacksonville, Florida, appeared in federal district court this morning and pled guilty to charges that he knowingly transported a minor in interstate commerce with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct, U.S. Attorney Leura G. Canary announced today.

In a plea hearing held before Federal Magistrate Judge Terry F. Moorner, Mitchell admitted that he had met the minor, a 15-year old female, in an online chat room, and that on October 1, 2007, he drove her from Bartow, Florida, to Andalusia, Alabama, with the intent to have sex with her. Mitchell also admitted knowing that the girl was underage. Title 18, United States Code, Section 2423(a) makes it a crime for any person to knowingly transport an individual who has not attained the age of 18 in interstate commerce with intent that the individual engage in any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense. Under Alabama law, it is a crime for a person 16 years old or older to engage in or attempt to engage in sexual intercourse with a member of the opposite sex less than 16 and more than 12 years old, provided that the actor is at least two years older than the member of the opposite sex. At the time of the offense, the defendant was 46 years old.

Based upon his conviction, Mitchell faces a minimum prison sentence of 10 years and a maximum possible penalty of life imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, and a lifetime term of

supervised release. A date for Mitchell's sentencing has not been set.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In May 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice launched Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by United States Attorneys' Offices, 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/.

The investigation of this case was conducted by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, acting in concert with the Alabama Bureau of Investigation and officers from the Polk County, Florida, Sheriff's Office, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the DeFuniak Springs, Florida, Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Nathan D. Stump is prosecuting the case.