

Department of Justice

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Western District of New York

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ROCHESTER MAN AND WOMAN CHARGED IN SEX TRAFFICKING CASE

ROCHESTER, N.Y.-- U.S. Attorney William J. Hochul, Jr. announced today that Otis Willis, 30, and Tiffany St. Denis, 23, both of Rochester, NY., were arrested and charged by criminal complaint sex trafficking of a minor. The charge carries a mandatory minimum penalty of 10 years in prison, a maximum of life, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Tiffany H. Lee, who is handling the case, stated that according to the complaint, in March 2012, Amherst Police responded to a report regarding possible prostitution activity at the Red Roof Inn Hotel. An employee at the hotel recognized a teenage girl as someone being advertised on Backpage.com.

At the hotel, while conducting surveillance, police observed the defendants exit a room along with a 17-year-old. The teenage girl said that she met Willis in Rochester and that she went with him to a residence on Grand Avenue where she met St. Denis. Both defendants tried to convince the victim to engage in prostitution activities and pose for provocative. Willis also told the victim to go by another name. Investigators determined that two customers paid to have sex with the victim and St. Denis at the Red Roof Inn.

The complaint further alleges that in August 2012, the FBI was contacted concerning the possible prostitution of another young girl. On this occasion, a 16-year-old girl was allegedly promoted for prostitution by two individuals later identified as the defendants. The victim told authorities that she received cocaine for free from St. Denis. The defendant soon told the victim that she had engage in prostitution in order to continue receiving cocaine. When the victim expressed her desire to stop engaging in prostitution and go home, Willis beat her up.

"Forcing a young person into prostitution through violence has to be one of the most deplorable crimes not only in our country but across the globe," said U.S. Attorney Hochul.

"Exploiting the vulnerabilities of any individual for financial gain is also something this Office will not tolerate."

The defendants made an initial appearance this morning before U.S. Magistrate Judge Marian W. Payson and are being detained pending a detention hearing on December 19, 2012 at 12:15 p.m.

This case was 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. Led 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.

The criminal complaint is the culmination of an investigation on the part of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Cyber Crimes Task Force, which includes the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, under the direction of Sheriff Patrick O'Flynn, the Rochester Police Department under the direction of Chief James Sheppard, and Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, under the direction of Christopher M. Piehota, Special Agent in Charge, the Amherst Police Department, under the direction of Chief John Askey and the Monroe County District Attorney's Office under the direction of Sandra Doorley.

The fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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