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News Release

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Woman pleads guilty to producing child pornography, Delaware man sentenced on similar charges

MINNEAPOLIS – Earlier today in federal court in Minneapolis, a 44-year-old woman pleaded guilty to producing sexually explicit photographs of two young girls. Donna Mary Zauner, no known address, pleaded guilty to one count of production of child pornography. Zauner, who was indicted on April 12, 2011, entered her plea before United States District Court Judge Ann D. Montgomery.

In her plea agreement, Zauner admitted that beginning in September of 2010, she and Alec James Tafolla, age 52, of Claymont, Delaware, used two girls, who were both under the age of 12 at the time, to produce pornographic digital images. Zauner admitted taking the photos and sending them to Tafolla, at his direction. The photos were taken with Zauner's cell phone and sent to Tafolla via text message.

On July 25, 2011 Tafolla was sentenced to 192 months in prison followed by 15 years of supervised release on one count of production of child pornography in connection with this crime. He was indicted on January 11, 2011, and pleaded guilty on April 14, 2011. In his plea agreement, Tafolla admitted directing Zauner to take several of the pornographic pictures using Zauner's cell phone.

According to law enforcement documents filed in these cases, a Winona resident contacted police on October 6, 2010, to inform the police of a pornographic image of a young girl found on his computer. Previously, the man had been in a relationship with Zauner and had allowed her to live with him beginning on September 9, 2010. However, on October 6, 2010, Zauner left his residence without notice. The man checked his computer history in an attempt to find information about Zauner's whereabouts but, instead, came across an email account he did not recognize. In this email account, he discovered the sexually explicit image of a child attached to an email in the account. Police determined the account belonged to Tafolla.

Later that night, authorities located Tafolla and Zauner in a Winona hotel. Police recovered from Zauner's cell phone an additional 23 sexually explicit photos of the two children. They further learned that Zauner and Tafolla had first met in August 2010 when Tafolla drove Zauner from Las Vegas, where she had been living, to New York. In early September, Tafolla had again given Zauner a ride, this time from New York to Minnesota. The two remained in contact while Zauner was living in New York and Minnesota. Zauner took the sexually explicit photographs of the children and sent them to Tafolla while she was living in Minnesota.

For her crime, Zauner faces a a mandatory minimum penalty of 15 years and a maximum potential penalty of 30 years in prison. Judge Montgomery will determine Zauner's sentence at a future hearing, yet to be scheduled.

These cases are the result of an investigation by the Winona Police Department and the Minnesota Cyber Crimes Task Force, which is sponsored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service. They are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Karen B. Schommer.

The U.S. Department of Justice is committed to combating the sexual exploitation of children, particularly via the Internet. For more information about these efforts, please visit the Department's Project Safe Childhood website, at www.projectsafchildhood.gov.

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