



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

News Release

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Rochester man pleads guilty to armed robbery of three McDonald's

MINNEAPOLIS—Earlier today in federal court in St. Paul, a 24-year-old Rochester man pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the armed robbery of McDonald's restaurants in Byron, Rochester, and Winona. Christian Aaron Alexander specifically pleaded guilty to three counts of interference with commerce by robbery, in violation of the Hobbs Act, and one count of brandishing a firearm in relation to a crime of violence. Alexander, who was charged on September 8, 2011, entered his plea before United States District Court Judge Donovan W. Frank.

In his plea agreement, Alexander admitted that he stole money from each restaurant and, in the process, threatened employees with a firearm. On September 19, 2010, Alexander stole approximately \$1,882 from the Winona McDonald's; on June 15, 2011, approximately \$1,851 from the Byron McDonald's; and on June 26, 2011, approximately \$2,740 from the Rochester McDonald's. For the Winona and Byron robberies, Alexander worked with an accomplice, and during the Byron robbery, he discharged a firearm. He also admitted that in all three robberies, he stole personal property belonging to the victims, who were restaurant employees. Moreover, he physically restrained the victims during the robberies by locking them in the restaurants' walk-in coolers.

A law enforcement affidavit filed in the case states that on September 19, 2010, employees at the Winona McDonald's reported they had been approached by two masked men as they

entered the restaurant shortly after 4:00 a.m. One of the men was armed with a pistol. After obtaining the combination for the safe from an employee, the men opened it, took the employees' wallets and cell phones, and ordered the employees into the walk-in cooler. When the employees exited the cooler approximately 20 minutes later, the robbers were gone, having stolen money from the safe.

On June 15, 2011, the Byron McDonald's was robbed in a similar fashion, about the same time. However, in that case, the two robbery suspects were a man and a woman. Moreover, during that robbery, a shot was fired by the male suspect, although no one was injured. Then, on June 26, 2011, the Rochester McDonald's was robbed by a lone armed male.

On September 20, 2010, during an unrelated investigation, police found receipts for the purchase of masks similar to those used during the Winona robbery. Surveillance videos at the retail outlet where the masks were purchased show a man, later identified as Alexander, buying those masks.

The investigation into these robberies continued, and several weeks after the Rochester incident, police traveled to Alexander's residence, where they found him in his vehicle. Officers also found cash lying on the floor of the back seat. They seized a gun, a plastic bag containing numerous rounds of ammunition, a couple McDonald's bags, and clothing that matched those worn by the robber in these cases. At that point, Alexander was arrested.

The Hobbs Act, passed by Congress in 1946, allows federal prosecutors to prosecute violent, habitual criminals who commit armed robbery in places of business involved in interstate commerce. Federal prosecution of those cases is sometimes beneficial since the penalties are often tougher than under state law. Furthermore, because the federal system has no parole, those who receive federal sentences serve virtually the entire time imposed.

For his crimes, Alexander faces a potential maximum penalty of life in prison for brandishing a firearm and 20 years on each count of interfering with commerce by robbery. Judge Frank will determine his sentence at a future hearing, yet to be scheduled.

This case is the result of an investigation by the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Rochester and Winona police departments, and the Olmsted County Sheriff's Office. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Thomas M. Hollenhorst.

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