

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Visiting Priest Admits Fondling Teenager Aboard Newark-Bound Jetliner

(More)

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NEWARK – A priest traveling from Poland to the United States in July pleaded guilty today to a felony charge of abusive sexual contact for fondling a 16-year-old girl aboard a flight to Newark Liberty International Airport, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Tomasz Adam Zielinski, 32, a Polish national in the U.S. on a religious visa, admitted before U.S. District Judge Jose L. Linares that he fondled the teenager seated next to him on a flight from Warsaw, Poland to Newark.

Zielinski surrendered to Special Agents of the FBI on July 11, following an investigation of events on the aircraft that arrived in Newark on July 5. He first was charged in a criminal Complaint with misdemeanor simple assault but was indicted on July 17 on the felony charge of abusive sexual contact aboard a flight bound for the United States. The charge carries a maximum statutory penalty of two years in federal prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Judge Linares scheduled sentencing for Jan. 20.

Zielinski, who is associated with a church in Manville, will likely face deportation upon completion of his sentence.

According to the initial criminal Complaint, Zielinski was seated next to the girl when he began touching her inappropriately. The girl responded by asking the flight crew to change her seat and was accommodated. Later in the flight, Zielinski allegedly approached her again, apologized and asked for forgiveness. The flight crew directed Zielinski back to his seat.

During his guilty plea today, Zielinski admitted that he touched the victim's inner thigh, lower abdomen and groin area through her clothing. He admitted that he did so without her permission and to arouse or gratify his sexual desire.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Linares will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI in Newark, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun, with the investigation of Zielinski.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney L. Judson Welle in Newark.

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Defense Counsel: David S. Kwon, Esq., Newark