



OFFICE OF THE MERCER COUNTY PROSECUTOR

ANGELO J. ONOFRI

Prosecutor

VELDON HARRIS

Chief of County Detectives

209 S. Broad Street, 3rd Floor
P.O. Box 8068
Trenton, New Jersey 08650-0068
Phone: (609) 989-6350
mercercountyprosecutor.com

DORIS M. GALUCHIE

First Assistant Prosecutor

MICHAEL J. NOVEMBRE

Deputy Chief of County Detectives

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CONTACT: Casey A. DeBlasio

(609) 989-6379

Nineteen Count Indictment Charges Four Individuals with Human Trafficking, Sex Assault, Promoting Prostitution

A Mercer County grand jury recently returned a 19-count indictment charging four individuals with human trafficking, sexual assault, promoting prostitution, and other crimes, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri reported.

The indictment, returned on January 11, charges Darrell Smith, 47, Gabriel Tabor, 28, Shannon Heisler, 37, and Jennifer Willis, 33, with the following:

- conspiracy, first degree
- four counts of human trafficking, first degree
- two counts of facilitating human trafficking, second degree
- three counts of promoting prostitution, third degree
- promoting organized street crime, second degree, and
- tampering with a witness, third degree.

Smith is additionally charged with third-degree aggravated assault, third-degree terroristic threats, third-degree criminal restraint and four counts of second-degree sexual assault. All four defendants are Trenton residents.

Smith was initially indicted in March 2018 on this case. The case was represented to a grand jury last week after further investigation uncovered an additional victim and evidence that other defendants were involved.

The indictment alleges that, between December 16, 2017 and December 23, 2017, Darrell Smith was allowing a young woman to stay at his residence, but he was forcing her to engage in prostitution against her will. Smith was also sexually assaulting the victim himself. Smith was arrested in December 2017 and charged with these crimes.

Further investigation revealed that Jennifer Willis was living at the house during this time and was placing sexually suggestive ads of herself and the victim on Backpage.com. Information was later developed that another victim was living in the house from October 2017 through February 2018, and being forced into prostitution in the same manner by Smith, Willis, Gabriel Tabor and Shannon Heisler. Detectives also discovered that Tabor and Willis were posting this second victim on Backpage for Smith while he was in jail.

Onofri credited Detective Alicia Bergondo and his office's Human Trafficking Unit with the investigation leading to the indictment. The case is being prosecuted by Senior Assistant Prosecutor Heather Hadley.

Anyone with additional information is asked to contact Detective Bergondo at (609) 278-2754.

First-degree crimes carry a maximum penalty of 20 years in state prison and a \$200,000 fine. Second-degree crimes carry a maximum penalty of 10 years in state prison and a \$150,000 fine. Third-degree crimes carry a maximum penalty of five years in state prison and a \$15,000 fine.

Despite having been indicted, every defendant is presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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