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Trenton Man Pleads Guilty to First-Degree Human Trafficking

A Trenton man indicted in January 2019 pleaded guilty last week to human trafficking, Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri announced.

Darrell Smith, 48, of Trenton, pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree human trafficking and one count of third-degree tampering with a witness before Mercer County Superior Court Judge Peter E. Warshaw on October 10. Under the terms of the plea agreement, Smith will face an aggregate of 10 years in state prison when he is sentenced on December 13.

Onofri credited Detective Alicia Bergondo and the prosecutor's Human Trafficking Unit with the investigation leading to the guilty plea. Senior Assistant Prosecutor Heather Hadley and Assistant Prosecutor Caitlyn Kelly represented the state. Smith is scheduled to be sentenced on December 13.

In January 2019, a Mercer County grand jury returned a 19-count indictment charging Smith and three other individuals with human trafficking, sexual assault, promoting prostitution, and other crimes.

The indictment charged Smith, 47, Gabriel Tabor, 29, Shannon Heisler, 38, and Jennifer Willis, 34, 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 was 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. The cases against Tabor, Heisler and Willis all remain pending.

Smith was initially indicted in March 2018 on this case. The case was represented to a grand jury in January 2019 after further investigation uncovered an additional victim and evidence that other defendants were involved.

The indictment alleged 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 young woman 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.

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Darrell Smith