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21 Men Arrested in Undercover Operation Targeting Child Predators Using Social Media to Lure Children for Sex

Charges Stem from "Operation Risky Business," a Collaborative Investigation Led by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, Division of Criminal Justice, New Jersey State Police, and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations

TRENTON – New Jersey Acting Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and Mercer County Prosecutor Angelo J. Onofri today announced the arrests of 21 alleged child predators in "Operation Risky Business," a multi-agency undercover operation targeting individuals who allegedly were using social media in an attempt to lure underage girls and boys for sexual activity. The defendants will be prosecuted by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office and the Division of Criminal Justice.

The underage "children" were, in fact, undercover officers. Most of the defendants in Operation Risky Business were arrested at either the undercover residence in Hamilton Township or another meet-up location, including the Hamilton Train Station. Those who went to the undercover house allegedly expected to find their victims home alone. Instead, they found law enforcement officers prepared to arrest them and process any evidence seized. Those arrested include four Megan's Law registrants, an injury lawyer from Georgia, an information technology worker, a dump truck driver, and a pastry chef from the Pocono Mountains region. One defendant was arrested and charged in two cases because he was chatting online with two separate undercover officers.

The operation was led by the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Unit, the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice Financial and Cyber Crimes Bureau, and the New Jersey State Police, in collaboration with U.S. Homeland Security Investigations, and additional federal, state and county law enforcement agencies listed below.

“Operation Risky Business is a great example of how successful law enforcement agencies can be when they collaborate across all levels like they did here by proactively investigating and arresting predators who sought to sexually exploit children,” said Acting Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin. “We are committed to working collaboratively in order to aggressively investigate and prosecute sex offenders. But we also need parents to talk to their children about the dangers of social media and let them know not everyone who they encounter online is who they initially claim to be.”

“Not in Mercer. Not our children. Not under my watch. That’s the message we are sending to sexual predators with collaborative efforts like Operation Risky Business,” said Prosecutor Onofri. “Social media sites have become hunting grounds for individuals looking to exploit children. Law enforcement will continue to use every investigative tool at our disposal to aggressively pursue and prosecute these predators that attempt to exploit our most innocent victims, but we can’t do it alone. Parents and guardians can do their part by remaining vigilant. Talk to your children about the dangers that exist on social media and gaming apps, and monitor their online activity.”

“Through collaborative efforts like this, we are sending a strong message to parents that we must remain vigilant and do our part to protect children by keeping communication open and warning them about the dangers of the Internet,” said Director Lyndsay V. Ruotolo of the Division of Criminal Justice. “We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners across all levels to investigate, apprehend, and prosecute offenders who attempt to sexually exploit children. There is no higher priority than keeping our children safe.”

“Operation Risky Business was a complete success; however, it is also a sobering reminder that there is no shortage of online predators willing to exploit children,” said Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police. “We remain committed to seeking out these criminals but remind parents and guardians that they need to be aware of the dangers that exist online and do their part to actively monitor and safeguard their children’s activity.”

“HSI is committed to supporting coordinated operations, helping ensure the children of our communities are protected from dangerous predators,” said Special Agent in Charge Jason J. Molina of HSI Newark.

About half of the arrests in Operation Risky Business were made over a four-day period from April 7 through April 10. The defendants were from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and one from Georgia. They are variously charged with offenses including second-degree attempted luring, second-degree attempted sexual assault, third-degree attempted endangering the welfare of a child, and fourth-degree attempted criminal sexual contact. Arrest warrants for the remainder of the suspects were forwarded to the U.S. Marshals Service, who tracked down the rest of the alleged predators over the last few weeks.

The undercover law enforcement members who conducted the chats with the defendants were specially trained members of the New Jersey ICAC Task Force. The defendants typically initiated contact based on profiles posted on social media platforms by the undercover detectives and agents. The social platforms that were used in these encounters included Kik, Skout, Whisper, Grindr, GROWLr, and MeetMe. Once chatting began, the undercover officers clearly identified themselves as underage girls or boys. Despite that information, the defendants allegedly engaged the purported “children” in conversations about sex, and all 21 defendants are alleged to have made arrangements to meet the “children” for sex. Some of the chats were conducted over a period of several weeks leading up to the “meet-up” week when arrests were made.

Prosecutor Onofri advised parents to familiarize themselves with the apps their children use, as well as signs that their children may be targets of online exploitation. “Spending an increasing amount of time online, becoming secretive about their online conduct, switching screens or closing tabs or windows whenever a parent is close, using sexual language they would not be expected to know and becoming emotionally volatile, these are all red flags,” he said.

The undercover house was staffed with dozens of law enforcement officers, analysts and attorneys. Attorneys and detectives drafted search warrants for electronic devices that were seized from the defendants. These devices were taken to the forensic computer laboratory at the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office for full forensic examinations. These examinations, which are ongoing, will enable investigators to determine if the devices contain evidence of any prior encounters by the defendants with underage victims, which might constitute additional cases of luring, sexual assault or child endangerment.

The defendants were lodged in the Mercer County Correction Center until detention hearings were held. Three defendants - Gregory Barger (who is a registered sex offender in Pennsylvania), Justin Wann, and James Hendryx - were ordered detained in jail pending trial. The other defendants were released subject to stringent pre-trial monitoring conditions, including at a minimum reporting regularly to Pre-Trial Services staff and prohibitions from using the internet except for work or having any unsupervised contact with children under 18.

The following 21 men were arrested in Operation Risky Business and are charged as indicated. They allegedly believed they were communicating with a minor as described in parentheses. The prosecuting agency is also specified.

1. **Laurentiu Tonea, 41, East Windsor, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Tonea is an information technology worker in Edison, NJ. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted criminal sexual contact, attempted luring. The Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office (MCPO) is prosecuting.
2. **Richard Parsons, 42, Cumming, GA.** (Girl, 14) Parsons is an injury lawyer. Charges: Two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted criminal sexual

contact. MCPO is prosecuting.

3. **Michael Kramer, 52, Philadelphia, PA.** (Girl, 15) Kramer is a dump truck driver. Charges: Attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted sexual assault, attempted possession of child pornography, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
4. **Robert Franklin, Gloucester City, NJ.** (Girl, 13) Charge: Attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.
5. **Jesus Clavel Villa, 49, Trenton, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Villa is a cook in Trenton. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child. The Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) is prosecuting.
6. **Moises Cortes Diaz, 35, New Brunswick, NJ.** (Girl, 13) Diaz is a self-employed painter. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. DCJ is prosecuting.
7. **Joseph Roman, 31, Denville, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Roman is unemployed and a registered sex offender. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
8. **Emanuel Rodriguez, 25, Trenton, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Charges: Two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
9. **Gregory Barger, 37, Morrisville, PA.** (Girl, 14) Barger is a self-employed painter and a registered sex offender in Pennsylvania. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted kidnapping. MCPO is prosecuting.
10. **Justin Wann, 35, Paulsboro, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Wann is a self-employed painter. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted kidnapping, attempted criminal sexual contact, attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.
11. **Frank Duggan, 54, Bordentown, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Duggan is unemployed. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. DCJ is prosecuting.
12. **Nestor Alonso Chappuis, 37, Hamilton, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Chappuis is unemployed and a registered sex offender. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.
13. **Evan Sluka, 27, Blakeslee, PA.** (Girl, 14) Sluka is a chef in Stroudsburg, PA. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted criminal sexual contact. DCJ is prosecuting.

14. **James Hendryx, 26, Hamilton, NJ.** (Boy, 14) Hendryx is unemployed. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.
15. **Kyle Zang, 31, Stewartstown, PA.** (Girl, 14) Charges: Two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
16. **Justin Wann, 35, Paulsboro.** (Girl, 14) Wann is a self-employed painter. Charges: Four counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting. This second case is based on an additional chat with another undercover officer.
17. **Christopher Baez, 36, New York, NY.** (Girl, 14) Baez is a restaurant worker. Charges: Two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
18. **Joseph Zekas, 49, Williamstown, NJ.** (Girl, 13) Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted criminal sexual contact, attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.
19. **Taylor Picillo, 29, Hamilton, NJ.** (Boy, 14). Picillo is employed by a solar energy equipment supplier in Rocklin, CA. Charges: Attempted sexual assault, attempted luring, attempted endangering the welfare of a child, resisting arrest. MCPO is prosecuting.
20. **William Oldham, 45, Williamstown, NJ.** (Girl, 14) Oldham is a fence installer. Charges: Two counts of attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted manufacturing of child pornography. MCPO is prosecuting.
21. **Charles Amer, 50, Maple Shade, NJ.** (Girl, 13) Amer is a warehouse laborer and a registered sex offender. Charges: Attempted endangering the welfare of a child, attempted luring. MCPO is prosecuting.
22. **Yohann Rigogne, 41, Philadelphia, PA.** (Girl, 14) Rigogne is unemployed. Charge: Attempted endangering the welfare of a child. MCPO is prosecuting.

Second-degree charges carry a sentence of five to 10 years in state prison and a fine of up to \$150,000, while third-degree charges carry a sentence of three to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$15,000. Fourth-degree charges carry a sentence of up to 18 months in prison and a fine of up to \$10,000.

Prosecutor Onofri commended all of the individuals and agencies who conducted Operation Risky Business. He thanked the members of the ICAC Unit who led and coordinated the operation for the Mercer County Prosecutor's Office, particularly Sergeants Joe Paglione and Michael Castaldo, under the direction of Chief of Detectives Jessica Plumeri. He also thanked Assistant Prosecutor

Alycia Beyrouthy, chief of ICAC, and Chief Jillian Carpenter of the state Division of Criminal Justice Financial and Cyber Crimes Bureau.

He further commended all of the members of the New Jersey State Police who worked on Operation Risky Business, under the direction of Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, particularly Lieutenant Stephen Urbanski and Detective Sergeant Paul Sciortino, and all of the special agents of U.S. Homeland Security Investigations – Cherry Hill Field Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Jason J. Molina, particularly Supervisory Special Agent John Fitch.

Prosecutor Onofri also thanked the following federal, state and county agencies that assisted in Operation Risky Business:

- New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice Financial and Cyber Crimes Bureau
- New Jersey Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- Mercer County Prosecutor's Office
- Mercer County Sheriff's Office
- Bergen County Prosecutor's Office
- Camden County Prosecutor's Office
- Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office
- Mercer County Central Motor Pool

The charges against the defendants in Operation Risky Business are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Because they are indictable offenses, they will be presented to a grand jury for potential indictment.

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