

A close call: Godfrey terror suspect's social media contained links to ISIS

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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GODFREY - More details are emerging after yesterday's announcement by **Madison County State's Attorney Tom Gibbons** and **Madison County Sheriff John Lakin** regarding a local teenager charged providing material support with terrorism.

Keaun Lamar Cook, 18, of the **1300 block of Galahad** in Godfrey, was charged with one count of providing material support for terrorism and one count of making a terrorist threat yesterday. Those charges came as a result of an individual reporting the threat to the **Madison County Sheriff's Office**. Gibbons said the deputy arriving on the scene "knew exactly how serious the situation was" upon his arrival.

"This wasn't a kid making up a bomb threat to get out of finals," Gibbons said. "He was actively communicating with an organized group about planning an act, which may result in mass casualties. This was serious."

Gibbons could not comment about which terrorist group Cook was allegedly contacting. However, on his Facebook page, Cook posted an image of a man beheaded by the so-called **Islamic State**, or **ISIS**, as recently as Aug. 23, 2016. The image featured a decapitated corpse next to a disembodied head and a chopping log as a militant is seen holding a machete. It was titled, "ISIS beheads elderly man accused of witchcraft." The image was found via a Google Image Search and Cook posted it with the words, "American feast."

While Gibbons could not comment on the nature of the alleged material support found at the young man's residence, he did say bomb-making materials were not found. He also stated people can cause mass casualty events without using bombs or guns.

"We've seen people do knife attacks," he said. "I think it's important to realize anything can be used as a weapon."

Automobiles were also given as an example as a weapon used for mass casualties by Gibbons. Such an attack was committed in **Nice, France** on Bastille Day by a Tunisian man driving a large truck through a crowd of people.

At this time, no specific targets have been named by Gibbons or any other official involved with the case. Officials speaking on the condition of anonymity did tell Riverbender.com targets may have included schools as well as other locations.

Alton Interim Superintendent Mark Cappel said he was not made aware of any threats to the **Alton School District**. He said **Madison County Sheriff's Deputy Mike O'Malley** has been keeping the district updated with details of the case. At this time, Cappel said security has not been increased at the schools. He said he feels "completely safe" with both the **Alton Police Department** and Madison County Sheriff's Office handling the situation.

Lewis and Clark Community College Vice President of Administration Lori Artis confirmed Cook was enrolled in the college's adult basic education program since 2013. She said she was not aware of any credible threats to the college at this time.

"As we understand from information shared by Madison County at yesterday's news conference, there is no credible evidence of a scheduled event planned at this time, and we recognize that the Sheriff's Department would contact us if a credible risk developed," she said in an email. "We also recognize that our students, faculty, staff and anyone aware of yesterday's news has an increased concern related to safety. Our security staff, as always will have a very visible presence on campus and should anyone have an immediate concern about safety, they should make contact with one of our security officers. We take this news seriously and will continue to monitor our campuses for anything out of the ordinary. We encourage those with any information or concerns about Lewis and Clark's campus safety to contact our security department or their local law enforcement agency."

Cook seems to have been "self-radicalized," Gibbons said. He also said there was no credible evidence linking Cook to any terrorist elements in **Madison County**, or even the St. Louis Area. He would not comment on the location of Cook's alleged contacts.

The teen's motivation behind the alleged plot is not known by Gibbons at this time either. When asked about Cook's mental health, Gibbons said his office was "keenly working" on finding out why Cook would allegedly want to carry out such an attack.

"I don't know what drives anyone to be self-radicalized," Gibbons said.

The deputy's fast-acting may have spared the River Bend from a very bad situation, Gibbons said. Federal authorities were contacted immediately after the discovery of Cook's alleged material support for terrorism.

"We'll never know for sure , and thank God we will never know for sure," Gibbons said.

As of yesterday, Cook was in the Madison County Jail on a \$150,000 bond. Both charges are Class X felonies, which may result in a maximum penalty of 40 years if convicted.