

# **Jury Convicts Coles County Sex Offender for Sexual Exploitation of Children**

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PEORIA, Ill. – A federal jury deliberated for approximately two hours before returning its guilty verdicts this afternoon against Jeffrey M. West, 53, of the 1300 block of S. Third St., Mattoon, Ill., for the seven counts charged: two counts of sexual exploitation of minors; two counts of commission of the offense by a registered sex offender; two counts of receiving child pornography; and, one count of possession of child pornography.

Sentencing for West has been scheduled for Sept. 13, 2021, before Senior U.S. District Judge Michael M. Mihm. West faces statutory penalties of 25 to 50 years in prison for sexual exploitation of a minor plus consecutive terms of 10 years in prison for each of the two counts of commission of the offense as a registered sex offender. West has a

prior conviction in Coles County for aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a 10-year-old female and a 4-year-old male.

Over two days of testimony this week, the government presented evidence to establish that West was identified when a minor disclosed that West had sexually abused him in 2019. During the subsequent investigation, computer forensic analysis showed that West had collected more than 1000 images and videos of child pornography, including sexually explicit depictions of infants and prepubescent minors, which were found on multiple devices in his home and at his business, West Side Motors, in Mattoon.

In addition, the government's evidence showed that West used the video-chatting website Omegle to entice and coerce multiple unidentified minor males to engage in sexually explicit conduct which he captured for his collection. According to testimony from an FBI expert, Omegle's website warns its users about predatory behavior because the website provides anonymity features that are often used by individuals with a sexual interest in children.

West was arrested on May 24, 2019, in Mattoon, Ill., on state charges, but was released on bond. On Sept. 4, 2019, a federal grand jury charged West by indictment and he was arrested on the federal charges. On Sept. 16, 2019, U.S. Magistrate Judge Eric I. Long ordered that West be detained pending trial. He has remained in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service since his arrest.

The charges are the result of an investigation by the Mattoon Police Department, with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Coles County State's Attorney's Office. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Elly Peirson and Keith Hollingshead-Cook represented the government at trial.

The case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative by the Department of Justice to combat the epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the internet as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit [www.projectsafekidhood.gov](http://www.projectsafekidhood.gov).