

# **New FBI Undercover Operation Snares Six, One Man Is From Edwardsville**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
July 1 2021 5:28 AM



**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** – Six more men from Missouri and Illinois are facing federal charges for attempting to engage in sexual activity with minors.

The crimes allegedly occurred in the Southern District of Illinois. U.S. Attorney Steven D. Weinhoeft and FBI-Springfield Special Agent in Charge Sean M. Cox made the announcement. The cases are the result of an FBI-led operation involving multiple federal and state law enforcement agencies aimed at rooting out internet users attempting to meet children for sex. All six men have been charged by federal complaint.

Justin Schneider, 33, of Edwardsville, is charged with attempted enticement of a minor.

All six defendants are accused of using the internet to entice someone under 17 years old to engage in unlawful sexual activity and traveling to a specific location to engage in sexual acts with a minor. Some of the defendants allegedly traveled across state lines and /or offered to pay for sex, leading to additional charges. Several of them allegedly had items with them when they were arrested, including alcohol, sex toys, condoms, and

candy. No actual minors were harmed during the two-day operation. If convicted, the defendants each face at least 10 years in prison and could receive as much as life behind bars.

**Others involved in the sting of arrests are:**

Eric E. Hamilton, II, 22, of Maryland Heights, Missouri, is charged with attempted enticement of a minor and traveling across state lines with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct.

Godfrey C. Hubbard, 52, of Sorento, Illinois, is charged with attempted enticement of a minor.

Christopher M. Simmons, 30, of St. Louis, Missouri, is charged with attempted commercial sex trafficking of a child, attempted enticement of a minor, and traveling across state lines with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct.

Michael James Smith, 39, of Barnhart, Missouri, is charged with attempted enticement of a minor.

James Tiroch, 37, of Florissant, Missouri, is charged with attempted enticement of a minor.

The investigation was led by FBI-Springfield, with assistance from-St. Louis, U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, the Collinsville Police Department, the Edwardsville Police Department, the Illinois State Police, the Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville Police Department, the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office, the Madison County States Attorney's Office, the Alton Police Department, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Macoupin County Sheriff's Office, Marion County Sheriff's Office, and the Carlyle Police Department. The cases will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Karelia Rajagopal and Ali Burns.

"Children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation across the internet," said U.S. Attorney Weinhoeft. "That's why we are continually updating our investigative techniques and casting a wide net over a variety of online applications and other internet platforms where children are at risk. To anyone who would prey on our kids, know this: law enforcement is watching, and you will be caught."

"The FBI works tirelessly in collaboration with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners to shut down child predators in hopes of preventing what could be a lifetime of trauma for victims," said Cox. "Children tend to be trusting online and will befriend strangers of any age or gender."

"Offenders take advantage of this naivety and target children who openly engage others online or who have a strong social networking presence. Parents and guardians are the first line of defense in preventing access to their children. Talk to your children, know what they're doing online, and if you suspect suspicious activity, don't hesitate to report it to the FBI."

Traveling across state lines to have sex with a minor is punishable by up to 30 years in prison. All of the offenses also carry a possible life term of supervised release and fines of up to \$250,000. Pending trial, all six defendants will be held without bond or released on electronic monitoring and other strict conditions, as required by federal law for these offenses.

*A complaint is merely a charge against a defendant. Under the law, a defendant is presumed to be innocent of the charge until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt to the satisfaction of a jury. These cases fall under the umbrella of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse.*