

# **Belleville Police Part Of Investigation: Jury Convicts Man for Using Online Dating App to Lure Teenage Girl**

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BENTON, Ill. – A Jefferson County, Missouri, man now faces at least 15 years in prison after a federal jury found him guilty Monday of arranging to have sexual activity with a minor, traveling to pick her up in Belleville, and producing sexually explicit images of her.

Belleville Police Department conducted the investigation, along with support from the Illinois State Police, and FBI-Springfield and Saint Louis Divisions.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Earl G. Rice, Jr., 63, chatted online via a dating application with a teenage girl. Rice quickly indicated his interest in traveling to Belleville, Illinois, from Dittmer, Missouri, to meet the victim and engage in sexual acts with her.

On Valentine's Day of 2018, Rice arrived with alcohol, condoms, and a candle to take the victim to a nearby motel. Rice engaged in sexual acts with the victim and produced sexually explicit images of the teen girl on his cell phone. Belleville Police Department apprehended Rice at the scene of the crime on February 15, 2018, after he was described driving a "red hooptie."

Graphic images taken by Rice of the minor victim were shown to the jury during the five-day trial held at the federal courthouse in Benton, Illinois. Jurors also saw surveillance footage from the motel and heard testimony about DNA evidence connecting Rice to the crimes.

Sentencing has been scheduled for January 27, 2022, in front of United States District Judge Staci M. Yandle. Enticement of a Minor is punishable by at least 10 years in prison and up to life; Travel with Intent to Engage in Illicit Sexual Conduct is punishable up to 30 years in prison, and Sexual Exploitation of a Minor (Production of Child Pornography) is punishable by at least 15 years in prison and up to 30 years.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ali Burns and Karelia Rajagopal.

This case was brought as part 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.