

# **Man Receives 50-year Sentence After Trial for Sexual Exploitation of Belleville Minor Female**

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BENTON – A Jefferson County, Missouri, man was sentenced to a total of 600 months in prison on Friday, February 25, 2022, after a federal jury found him guilty in October of 2021 for arranging to have sex with a minor, traveling to pick her up in Belleville, Illinois, and producing sexually explicit images of her.

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.

“Serious crimes deserve serious punishment, and we are very satisfied with the 50-year sentence imposed on Earl Rice. Nothing could be more important than keeping children safe from sex offenders,” said United States Attorney Steven D. Weinhoeft. “This case is another reminder for parents to be vigilant about their kids’ online activity and to monitor the apps on their phones.”

“While this sentence ensures that Rice will never again subject another child to sexual abuse and exploitation, it will not erase the devastating and long-term impact for the victim,” said Special Agent in Charge David Nanz of the FBI Springfield Field Office. “The FBI remains steadfast in our dedication to identify, investigate and arrest those who seek to harm children. If you suspect a child is or could become a victim of a sexual predator, don’t hesitate to contact local law enforcement or the FBI.”

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

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

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