

# **Jury Convicts St. Louis Man for Attempted Sex Crimes Against a Minor**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
March 31 2023 10:21 AM



**EAST ST. LOUIS** – In a U.S. District courtroom Wednesday, a federal jury returned guilty verdicts against a St. Louis man accused of several attempted sex crimes against a minor. Members of the jury found Vallie Francis Zeller, 46, guilty of Attempted Enticement of a Minor, Travel with Intent to Engage in Sexual Conduct with a Minor and Attempted Sexual Exploitation of a Minor after evidence presented at trial showed he was conversing online with an alleged 15-year-old girl with the intention of having sex with the minor.

“The defendant deliberately tried to exploit a minor for sexual activity and chose to drive across state lines to engage in criminal sex acts, and I’m grateful the jury convicted him on all counts,” said U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe. “The FBI works diligently to protect minors from online predators, and I appreciate their collaboration with our office to put this offender behind bars.”

“The FBI’s investigation revealed a deliberate attempt by Vallie Zeller to victimize a child. Our utilization of proactive investigative techniques stopped Zeller from completing the harm he intended,” said FBI Springfield Field Office Special Agent in Charge David Nanz. “We are grateful to the many law enforcement partners who participated in this investigation.”

According to court documents and evidence presented during the trial, Zeller started conversing on an online platform with a profile created by an undercover FBI agent in June 2020. The agent was posing as a 15-year-old girl, and Zeller began sexually explicit conversations with the account, requested sexually explicit images of the minor, and made plans to meet for illegal sexual activity, knowing she was a minor. Zeller was convicted of driving across the Missouri-Illinois border to engage in criminal sexual activity once the agent gave him an address for a residence in Collinsville to meet the purported minor.

In addition, during the conversation over several days, Zeller asked the alleged girl for nude photographs and other sexually-explicit content. Sentencing is scheduled for July 18, 2023. For his convictions, Zeller faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years in federal prison. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ali Burns and Zoe Gross are prosecuting the case. Zeller was one of 14 defendants charged by the U.S. Attorney’s Office in the Southern District of Illinois in June 2020 as the result of an operation involving multiple local, state and federal law enforcement agencies that targeted online predators attempting to meet minors for sex.

The FBI Springfield Field Office led the investigation with assistance by the FBI St. Louis Field Office, the U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations, the Belleville Police Department, the Collinsville Police Department, the Edwardsville Police Department, the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office, the Illinois State Police, the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Police Department, the St. Louis County Police Department, the Swansea Police Department, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Alton Jail, the Monroe County Jail, and the St. Clair County Jail.