

Man Sentenced to 405 Months in Fed Prison for Attempted Sex Crimes Against a Minor

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EAST ST. LOUIS – The U.S. District Court in St. Louis today announced that a man - Vallie F. Zeller - had been sentenced by a judge for 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, and then traveled to Illinois to meet her.

The judge in the case sentenced the 46-year-old St. Louis man to spend nearly 34 years in federal prison following his conviction by a jury for several attempted sex offenses involving a purported minor.

In March 2023, a jury convicted Zeller. Following the federal prison sentence, Zeller will serve the rest of his life on supervised release.

“The defendant is a child predator, and our communities are better off with him spending time in federal prison,” said U.S. Attorney Rachelle Aud Crowe. “This operation was a strong, coordinated effort by federal, state and local law enforcement, and I appreciate their efforts to protect children in Southern Illinois.”

“This significant sentence delivers a message to anyone intent on harming children. The FBI and our law enforcement partners are committed to protecting children from the clutches of offenders like Zeller,” said FBI Springfield Field Office Special Agent in Charge David Nanz. “Every time a child predator is brought to justice, potential victims are spared immeasurable harm.” According to court documents and evidence presented during trial, Zeller began conversing online with a profile created by an undercover FBI agent in June of 2020.

"The agent was posing as a 15-year-old girl, and Zeller started sexually explicit conversations with the account, requested sexually explicit images of the minor, and made plans to meet the minor for illegal sexual activity. Zeller was also convicted of driving across the Missouri-Illinois border to engage in criminal sexual activity with the minor when the agent provided an address for a residence in Collinsville, where Zeller was arrested.

"Zeller's conversation with the purported minor lasted four days, during which Zeller asked the minor for nude photographs and other sexually explicit content. Evidence at sentencing established that Zeller had previously been accused of having sexual contact with two minors in Florida. Agents also uncovered additional sexual communications with another purported minor on Zeller's phone."

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Ali Burns and Zoe Gross prosecuted 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.