



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
DELAWARE COUNTY COURTHOUSE
MEDIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19063

610-891-4161

JOHN J. WHELAN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

EMILY H. HARRIS
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER

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CONTACT PERSON: Emily H. Harris, 610.891.4163

Aston man charged for patronizing victim of human trafficking

Media, Pa – Today Delaware County District Attorney Jack Whelan announced 28-year-old Matthew Jeffrey Sipps of Aston is the first in Delaware County to be charged under Pennsylvania’s new human trafficking legislation for engaging in a sex act with a victim while knowing that the act was the result of that individual being a victim of human trafficking.

Matthew Jeffrey Sipps, 28, of the 100 block of Sweigart Lane in Aston is charged with patronizing a victim of a sexual servitude, a felony of the second degree, concealment of the whereabouts of a child, a felony of the third degree, and corruption of minors, a misdemeanor charge. The arrest comes at the conclusion of an investigation conducted by Det. Mark Bucci of the Delaware County Criminal Investigation Division (CID) Child Abuse Unit and Sgt. Michael Ruggieri of the Aston Township Police Department.

On April 23, 2015, Officer Thomas Hearty of the Aston Township Police Department was contacted by Det. Bibby of the North Providence Rhode Island Police Department about 16-year-old female victim who contacted her mother to be picked up from 110 Sweigart Lane in Aston Township. The victim had been missing for 8-weeks according to her mother.

During the course of the investigation, detectives learned that the victim used HYPERLINK through www.backpage.com to seek employment as an escort. Through an online ad, she made contact with a man named using the name “Jordan” from New Jersey. After making contact, Jordan picked up the victim in Rhode Island and drove her to a hotel in New Jersey. According to the victim, she told him that she was 16-years old and had run away from home. Jordan told the victim that they were going to have sex because she was now “working” for him. After having sex with the victim several times over the course of three days, Jordan told the victim it was time for her to work. He took non-nude, scantily dressed photographs of the victim which he posted as a backpage ad under the category “Philadelphia adult entertainment>Philly escorts” advertising “18-year old Italian cutie Maria on spring break looking to go wild.” Over a two-week period, the child victim met four men for sex and was paid approximately \$2,500 which was split with Jordan.

In March 2015, Matthew Sipps responded to the backpage ad and met the victim at a hotel. Sipps went to the hotel on four occasions and paid the victim for sex. At one point, Sipps told the victim that he wanted to take her away from her current environment.

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She told him she was 16-years old and a runaway from Rhode Island but he moved forward with his plan and took her to his home in Aston where he lived with his mother and two adult brothers. The victim stayed with Sipps at his home for a month and they had sexual intercourse several times. Sipps told the victim to not leave, stay in Sipps room and to not socialize with his family. For over a week she told Sipps that she wanted to go home but he would not let her leave the house. Eventually Sipps provided the victim with a cell phone in his name and the victim contacted her mother in Rhode Island who then contacted local police about the whereabouts of her missing daughter.

In May 2015, FBI Special Agent Michael Goodhue and Det. Bucci met with Sipps. At that time, Sipps admitted to meeting the victim at motel in Marple Shade, New Jersey, after calling the phone number on backpage. Sipps was arrested on December 5, 2016 by police and arraigned by Magisterial District Judge Diane Holefelder who set bail at ten percent of \$50,000. Assistant District Attorney Pearl Kim, Chief of Human Trafficking, will be prosecuting the case.

Through the course of a separate federal investigation, the individual known as “Jordan” was later identified as Raymond Justis. On March 30, Justis pled guilty to federal charges of sex trafficking a minor and was sentenced 14 years in federal prison following the prosecution in federal court by Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle L. Morgan.

“This case is an example of what happens when federal and local law enforcement collaborate in order to combat human trafficking. I would like to commend CID Det. Bucci, Sgt. Michael Ruggieri of Aston Police, ADA and Chief of Human Trafficking Pearl Kim, Special Agent Michael Goodhue, Special Agent Jennifer Batish and AUSA Michelle Morgan as well as Child Advocacy Center (CAC) and the Delaware County Women Against Rape (WAR) for providing assistance to ensure a thorough and complete investigation,” said District Attorney Jack Whelan. “Their hard work and collaboration led to these arrests and, more importantly, made sure this child victim received treatment and was returned home to a safe, healthy environment. Together, we in law enforcement are committed to vigorously investigating and prosecuting those who traffic and exploit children for their own selfish gain.”

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