



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney
District of Maryland

Erek L. Barron
United States Attorney

Marcia A. Lubin
Public Affairs Specialist

36 S. Charles Street
Fourth Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21201-2692

410-209-4800
TTY/TDD: 410-962-4462
410-209-4885
FAX 410-962-3091
Marcia.Murphy@usdoj.gov

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Contact MARCIA LUBIN
at (410) 209-4854

FORMER BALTIMORE POLICE SWAT OFFICER SENTENCED TO 25 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF A CHILD TO PRODUCE CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

The Court Also Found that the Defendant Sexually Abused a Minor Victim

Baltimore, Maryland – U.S. District Judge Stephanie A. Gallagher sentenced Donald Hildebrandt, age 52, of Bel Air, Maryland, yesterday to 25 years in federal prison, followed by lifetime supervised release, for sexual exploitation of a child to produce child pornography, and possession of child pornography. The indictment was returned on June 3, 2021. Hildebrandt is a former Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) officer with the Baltimore Police Department.

The sentence was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Erek L. Barron; Special Agent in Charge James C. Harris of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Baltimore; Colonel Woodrow W. Jones III, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police; Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler; Lieutenant Paul Marziale of the Harford County Sheriff's Office, Director of the Harford County Child Advocacy Center; and Harford County State's Attorney Albert J. Peisinger, Jr.

According to his plea agreement, between 2018 and 2020, Hildebrandt purchased at least three "spy" cameras, which he hid in a shared bathroom in his home to secretly record minors showering and using the bathroom. Hundreds of videos of minors in various stages of undress were made, and the minors who were recorded were between the ages of three and 16. At least 10 children were recorded in videos taken in the bathroom and dozens of videos were produced that depicted children with exposed genitals, including at least five minors, four of whom were under 12 years of age.

As detailed in the plea agreement, Hildebrandt placed the cameras slightly above the seat of the toilet and at other location at a height designed to capture the victims' genitals while getting in and out of the shower, and while using the toilet. In order to record as many victims as possible, visitors were instructed to change clothes only in the bathroom and not in the bedrooms. The images recorded in the videos were located on Hildebrandt's computer which was seized during a search on October 20, 2021. Additional images depicting children engaged in sexually explicit conduct were found on other electronic media seized during the search.

One day prior to the execution of the search warrant, Hildebrandt was notified that he was the subject of a child exploitation investigation, through a witness and when he was contacted by a member of Child Protective Services. Sometime after that, but before the execution of the search warrant, Hildebrandt admitted that he performed a factory reset of his tablet. Investigators also did not locate any "spy" cameras in the residence.

Finally, it was also proved that Hildebrandt sexually abused a minor, demanding that the victim engage in sex acts with him.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorney's Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who sexually exploit children, and to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.justice.gov/psc. For more information about Internet safety education, please visit www.justice.gov/psc and click on the "Resources" tab on the left of the page.

United States Attorney Erik L. Barron commended HSI, the Maryland State Police, the Harford County Sheriff's Office, the Harford County Child Advocacy Center, and the Harford County State's Attorney's Office for their work in the investigation and prosecution. Mr. Barron thanked Assistant U.S. Attorneys Paul E. Budlow and Mary Setzer, who prosecuted the federal case.

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