

Man sentenced for attempting to sexually exploit two minors over X-Box Live

An Illinois man was sentenced yesterday in federal court in Springfield for attempting to sexually exploit two minors.

Zack Sawyer, 32, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Mark G. Mastroianni to 15 years in prison and 15 years of supervised release. In June 2017, Sawyer pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted sexual exploitation of minors.

Around May 2010, Sawyer used X-Box Live to contact a 12-year-old boy and a 13-year-old boy in Hampshire County, Mass., and asked them both to send him nude photographs. According to the statement of facts, when the first boy refused, Sawyer threatened to rape and kill him. Sawyer then asked the second boy, and when he, too, refused, Sawyer again threatened rape, adding that he had a drug that would paralyze people.

The government told the court that Sawyer also enticed a third boy in Loudon County, Va., and asked him to pose for a sexually explicit picture over the internet. Sawyer met the boy while playing the online game Minecraft. Sawyer sent a sexually explicit picture of himself to the boy, and Sawyer continued to ask the boy for sexually explicit videos.

Acting United States Attorney William D. Weinreb; United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Dana J. Boente; Colonel Kerry A. Gilpin, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police; and Michael Shea, Acting Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston, made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney Alex J. Grant of Weinreb's Springfield Branch Office and Assistant U.S. Attorney Jay Prabhu of Boente's Cybercrime Unit prosecuted the case.

The case is brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In 2006, the Department of Justice created Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative designed to protect children from exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the DOJ's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children, as well as identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov/.