

New Bedford man arrested on child exploitation charges

A New Bedford man was arrested yesterday in connection with receiving and possessing child pornography.

Robert David Austin, 41, was charged with receipt and possession of child pornography. Following an initial appearance before U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Jennifer C. Boal, Austin was detained pending a detention hearing scheduled for today at 3 p.m.

According to the charging documents, Austin engaged in a number of groups on a messenger application through which child pornography is disseminated. On Nov. 3, 2021, a search of Austin's residence revealed child pornography on his cell phone. Further analysis of Austin's phone identified the messaging application through which Austin engaged in the dissemination of child pornography.

The charge of receipt of child pornography provides for a sentence of at least five years and up to 20 years in prison, at least five years and up to a lifetime of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charge of possession of child pornography provides for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, at least five years and up to a lifetime of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. Sentences are imposed by a federal district judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Acting United States Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell and Matthew B. Millhollin, Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Boston, made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorney J. Mackenzie Duane of Mendell's Major Crimes Unit is prosecuting the case.

Members of the public who have questions, concerns or

information regarding this case should call 617-748-3274.

The case was 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 the 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/.

The details contained in the charging document are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.