



# BCPO News

**Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor**



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## **Texas Man Indicted for Violent, Racist Post in Student Group Chat**

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that a 21-year-old Texas man has been indicted for posting a comment calling for racial violence in a group chat created by a Northern Burlington Regional High School student in the spring of 2018.

Kenneth Petersen, of the 400 block of North Clinton Street in Stephenville, Texas, was indicted by a grand jury on one count of Bias Intimidation (Fourth Degree). The indictment was returned January 9 and signed by Prosecutor Coffina.

The investigation began in May 2018 after a Northern Burlington student who had created a group chat to discuss senior pranks using the messaging app GroupMe received a message from a sender she did not know that suggested "all the black people at the school" should be shot.

The student informed her teacher and police were notified. The comment raised particular concern in the school community because it was made as the 2018 graduation ceremony was approaching. The Mansfield Township Police Department immediately provided an increased presence on the campus, and it was quickly determined that the threat had come from out of state and that no students or members of the staff were in immediate danger. The investigation revealed that the message was posted by Petersen, who was attending a university in Texas at the time. He was arrested in September 2019 following a multi-agency investigation.

Access to the group chat was available to anyone with a GroupMe account, and had been discussed by students on other social media platforms. It is not clear what led Petersen to target that particular group chat.

"There can never be any tolerance for racially-motivated threats like this and, especially during recent times when we have seen threats escalate to actual acts of violence, law enforcement must respond with the utmost seriousness," Prosecutor Coffina said. "You cannot hide behind a cell phone halfway across the country while spewing such hatred."

The investigation was conducted by the Mansfield Township Police Department, with assistance from the BCPO, the New Jersey State Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Tarleton State University Police Department in Stephenville, Texas.

*An indictment is an accusation. Defendants are presumed innocent unless or until proven guilty.*

**END**

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