



BCPO News



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Youth Pastor Indicted for Online Sexual Exploitation of Young Males

Burlington County Prosecutor LaChia L. Bradshaw announced that a Palmyra man has been indicted on charges related to coaxing underage boys on social media to send him nude pictures and videos, then using that material to blackmail his victims into performing sexual acts on themselves for his enjoyment.

A grand jury indicted Sean Higgins, 31, on 75 total counts that included charges of Endangering the Welfare of a Child, Aggravated Sexual Assault, Criminal Sexual Contact, Cyber Harassment, and Obscenity to a Minor. Thirteen of the counts were first degree charges.

Higgins is accused of committing these crimes in 2020 while serving as the youth pastor and music leader at Harbor Baptist Church in Hainesport, and serving as a teacher at the Harbor Baptist Academy, a private K-12 school that is housed in the same facility.

The indictment includes 13 victims, ranging in age from 12 to 17, who resided in Alabama, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Tennessee. It was returned on August 16 and signed by Prosecutor Bradshaw. An arraignment will be scheduled soon in Superior Court in Mount Holly.

The crimes for which he was indicted did not include physical contact with the victims, and did not involve any members of the church congregation or students at the school.

He has been lodged in the Burlington County Jail in Mount Holly since being taken into custody at his residence in October 2020. With the assistance of the New Jersey State Police, search warrants were executed at that time on his home as well as the church, and multiple electronic devices were seized.

The investigation revealed that Higgins would adopt the persona of a teenage girl and utilize Snapchat and Instagram to begin a conversation with a juvenile male, introducing himself as Julie Miller. After establishing a rapport, he would suggest that they trade photos. Higgins would then send pictures of an unidentified female teenager.

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In return, Higgins would often receive nude photos that the victims took of themselves. Immediately upon receiving those images, he would take a screenshot of the victim's friends list that was visible on the forward-facing social media platform. Higgins would send that screenshot back to the victim and threaten to send the nude photos he had just received to the list of the victim's friends unless the victim did exactly what Higgins demanded.

In most of the cases that were investigated, Higgins then demanded that his victims go into the bathroom at their residence and place the phone on the floor, or at an angle looking up, and would instruct the victims to masturbate or perform sexual acts on themselves. Higgins would record what was transpiring.

According to the videos made by Higgins that were obtained during the investigation, victims would often beg Higgins to be allowed to stop engaging in sexual conduct, but Higgins would demand that they complete his instructions, or face the consequences of having the recordings he was making of the incident be sent to their list of friends.

The investigation began after a youth in Berks County, Pa., contacted Snapchat and reported that he sent nude photos of himself to someone he believed to be an unknown female. The unknown female, who in actuality was Higgins, had threatened to expose his nude photographs after they exchanged pictures. An underage male in Alabama also reported his communications with Higgins to law enforcement authorities.

The investigation was conducted by the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office High-Tech Crimes Unit, the Cinnaminson Township Police Department and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations – Cherry Hill. Multiple state and local agencies assisted in confirming the identities of additional victims once investigators became aware of their existence.

The BCPO High-Tech Crimes Unit, Cinnaminson Township Police Department and HSI – Cherry Hill are members of the New Jersey State Police Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force. The BCPO also belongs to the New Jersey State Police Cyber Terrorism Task Force.

Higgins is being prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Stephen Eife, supervisor of the BCPO Special Victims Unit.

Anyone who believes their child has had inappropriate interaction on Snapchat or Instagram with someone going by the user name of Julie Miller, Julia Miller, or some variation of that name, is asked to call Burlington County Central Communications at 609-265-7113, or send an email to tips@co.burlington.nj.us.

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

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