



THE UNITED STATES
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United States Attorney Martin Estrada
Central District of California

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Ventura County Child Exploitation Task Force Arrests Moorpark Man

VENTURA, California – The newly formed Ventura County Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force today announced the arrest of a Moorpark man who is charged in a federal criminal complaint with soliciting on social media platforms sexually explicit photos from two individuals he thought were 14-year-old girls.

Thomas Gissell, 27, of Moorpark, was taken into custody Monday morning by federal and state authorities participating in the Task Force.

Gissell is charged with attempted enticement of a minor, an offense that carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years in federal prison.

The Ventura County District Attorney's Office began investigating Gissell after receiving information that he had contacted undercover law enforcement officers posing as teenage girls. According to the affidavit in support of the complaint, Gissell engaged in online chats with the individuals and asked them to send nude photos.

Gissell was originally arrested on February 7 pursuant to charges filed by the Ventura County District Attorney's Office. Following that arrest, Task Force investigators determined Gissell had been receiving suspected child sexual abuse material during online chats with numerous victims around the country. The matter was subsequently presented to the United States Attorney's Office, which filed the federal complaint on February 27.

At his initial appearance Monday afternoon in United States District Court, Gissell was ordered freed upon the posting of a secured \$1 million bond. Once released, he will be subject to home incarceration with GPS monitoring. He was further ordered to have no contact with anyone under the age of 18 years old and no access to internet-connected devices. An arraignment in this case was scheduled for April 11.

The Ventura County Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force is comprised of investigators and prosecutors with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office, the Ventura County District Attorney's Office, the Simi Valley Police Department, the Oxnard Police Department, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, the FBI, and the United States Attorney's Office.

"We are committed to protecting our children by educating them about online predators, as well as focusing on proven enforcement and prosecution strategies," said United States Attorney Martin Estrada. "Law enforcement partnerships are key to combatting exploitation crimes that have harmed too many children, and we will continue to vigorously prosecute these terrible crimes."

“The FBI has worked seamlessly with our local law enforcement partners to address criminal violations of child exploitation and human trafficking throughout both Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties and has recently formalized that collaboration by creating an official task force to maximize resources,” said Donald Alway, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s Los Angeles Field Office. “This task force will utilize tools at the local and federal level to address crimes affecting vulnerable children and victims of sex trafficking and to hold offenders accountable.”

“The work done by this partnership of local, county and federal agencies is making a significant difference in the way that local law enforcement investigates, arrests and prosecutes perpetrators of child exploitation and human trafficking,” said Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko. “Having a dedicated team that specializes in this sensitive and increasingly high-tech form of child abuse is helping to stop people like Thomas Gissell from victimizing children.”

Members of the Task Force are specially trained in investigating online child sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and they strive to provide rapid responses to the sexual victimization of children. The Gissell investigation is the first criminal case brought by the Task Force.

“I am exceptionally proud of the work this task force has accomplished in working to safeguard our communities from child predators,” said Ventura County Sheriff Jim Fryhoff. “This task force perfectly exemplifies how successful law enforcement can be when we work together to protect our communities and I expect their great work will continue into the future.”

Each member of the Task Force brings a variety of skills, resources, and expertise to the team.

“The Simi Valley Police Department is committed to pursuing criminal offenders who engage in the creation and distribution of child sexual abuse material,” said SVPD Chief Steve Shorts. “Our department is committed to partnering with our federal and regional partners in order to assist in eradicating this worldwide problem and assist victims of sexual abuse.”

Task Force investigators believe there may be additional victims. If you have any information regarding Thomas Gissell, this case or other victims, please contact Detective Greg Webb of the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office, Thousand Oaks Sexual Assault Unit, at (805) 371-8309 or Greg.Webb@ventura.org.

A complaint is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.