



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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Judge Sends Former Paradise Town Councilor to Trial on Sexting Charges

A former Paradise Town councilman was in Butte County Superior Court today where a judge found sufficient evidence to sustain “sexting” charges involving his sending of sexually explicit messages and photos to an undercover sheriff’s detective portraying as a 16-year-old girl.

Michael Zuccolillo, 41, of Paradise was held to answer on charges of Arranging a Meeting with a Minor for the Purpose of Engaging in Lewd or Lascivious Behavior; Sending Harmful Material to a Minor; and for Communicating with a Minor for the Purpose of Engaging in Sexual Conduct. After the daylong hearing, Judge Michael Candela found probable cause that the charges were true and set the next hearing in the case for April 29, 2021 at which time Zuccolillo will reenter a plea and be set for a jury trial in the future.

District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the case began in February of 2020 when the Butte County Sheriff’s Office was contacted by a subject alleging he had evidence to prove Zuccolillo had been sending sexually explicit text messages and photographs of his genitals to a person Zuccolillo believed to be a 16-year-old female visiting the Sacramento area from China. The subject said the texts and photos were sent during an ongoing conversation that included discussion of Zuccolillo traveling to Sacramento to have sex with the purported 16-year-old and her adult sister. The subject told sheriff’s detectives he obtained the evidence by targeting Zuccolillo in what was best described as a self-initiated “to catch a predator” style operation. The subject informed detectives he took on the persona of a 16-year-old female and targeted Zuccolillo due to animosity he had for Zuccolillo resulting from a bad business deal.

Ramsey said sheriff’s detectives were appropriately leery of the information provided by the subject, and questioned its veracity, given the subject’s motivation for targeting Zuccolillo. However, given the seriousness of the allegations, detectives did not believe they could dismiss or ignore the allegations without conducting an independent investigation. Detectives took the information from the subject and told him to cease all contact with Zuccolillo. Detectives then initiated an independent investigation into the allegations.

During the course of that investigation, Ramsey said detectives consulted the Butte County District Attorney’s Office and Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Cellular telephone records for both Zuccolillo and the subject making the allegations were obtained through search warrants. The records provided preliminary confirmation of the allegations.

Ramsey said an undercover sheriff's detective, using the previously established persona of the 16-year-old female from China, began exchanging text messages with Zuccolillo. During those exchanges, Zuccolillo sent sexually explicit text messages and additional photos of his genitals to the undercover officer.

Ramsey said additional search warrants were obtained for Zuccolillo's home, vehicles and electronic devices. He was arrested and booked into Butte County Jail on April 14, 2020. He posted bail of \$135,000 that same day was released. He remains out of custody pursuant to his bail bond.