

## **Las Vegas Predator Sentenced to Life for Human Trafficking**

Ellis County and District Attorney Ann Montgomery announced that Deandre DeSuza, 28, of Las Vegas, Nevada, was sentenced to life in prison for Trafficking of Persons. This case was the first trafficking of persons jury trial in Ellis County. One of the ways a child is trafficked in Texas is when a person knowingly transports a child under the age of 18 and causes that child to engage in or become a victim of sexual assault. That is how this case was charged.

Around October 31, 2021, DeSuza began an online relationship with an Ellis County 14-year-old teenager. He started following her on TikTok, and they began to chat on Discord, an instant messaging and VOIP social platform. DeSuza groomed the child, asking her to confide in him about her mental health issues and complimenting her appearance. DeSuza flew to the metroplex and drove to Ellis County specifically for the purpose of sexually assaulting the child. He transported the child to a neighborhood hotel where he took explicit photographs and sexually assaulted the child. The family noticed the child was missing, saw disturbing messages on her phone and called 911. When DeSuza took the child home, he saw an Ellis County Sheriff deputy's vehicle outside of the home and then dropped the child off at a nearby creek. The child initially told her family nothing had happened, but later described sex acts in the hotel. She was immediately taken for a sexual assault nurse exam at Cook Children's and forensic evidence was collected. DNA results confirmed that DeSuza sexually assaulted the child.

The Ellis County Sheriff's Office retrieved surveillance videos and records from the hotel and was able to track DeSuza to Las Vegas. Federal Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) joined the case and searched DeSuza's Nevada home. HSI collected several electronic devices from his room and extracted data. The extractions contained many images of anime depictions of child sexual materials, child sexual abuse materials, explicit images DeSuza took of the child while they were at the hotel, and screenshots of their video chats from Discord. HSI also found images of "The pedo bear" on his devices, a known symbol of pedophiles on the dark web, as well as several search histories and web histories for pornographic sites simulating child sexual abuse materials or actual child sexual abuse materials.

On October 26, 2023, the jury swiftly delivered a guilty verdict and sentenced DeSuza to life in prison. 443<sup>rd</sup> District Court Judge Cindy Ermatinger, who presided over the trial, pronounced the sentence. Trafficking of Persons as charged in the indictment carries a sentencing range of 5 to 99 years or life in prison. The prompt reporting of this crime led to the recovery of many pieces of extrinsic evidence by law enforcement agencies that was helpful during the prosecution. Child sexual abuse cases are often reported months or years after the incident occurs. Juries are typically without physical evidence and tasked, in many cases, to rely solely on the word of a child.

"Human trafficking has been a target for law enforcement and prosecutors across the state of Texas because it can be deadly for our most vulnerable: our children. Trafficking adds an additional element of power for child abusers: the physical removal of a child from a safe environment for the specific purpose of violating their innocence. In this case, a predator boarded a plane with the intent to isolate and abuse one of our Texas children, and our jury could not allow him to remain free," stated Montgomery. "Victims of child sexual abuse do have the hope

of healing if they have support and justice; they deserve it. Our law enforcement, DA's Office, and Ellis County citizens continue to surround our children with these things, and I am proud to be a part of the healing process for our survivors.”

Felony Chief Grace Pandithurai and Assistant County and District Attorney Kayce Witt prosecuted the case, assisted by County and District Attorney Investigator Jospheh Aguilar, and Victim Assistance Coordinator Jamie Morales. The case was investigated by Sgt. Richard Hundley and retired Investigator Dennis Clay of the Ellis County Sheriff's Office and Homeland Security Investigation. The Ellis County and District Attorney's Office would like to thank the Ellis County Children's Advocacy Center and Cook Children's Hospital for providing needed services for the child.

