



PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

July 17, 2012

**FORMER ARMY RECRUITER FROM MIDLAND, TEX., PLEADS GUILTY
TO FEDERAL CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION CHARGES**

ALBUQUERQUE – This morning in federal court, Arnold Gonzales, 26, entered a guilty plea to an information charging him with interstate travel with intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor under a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

Under the terms of the plea agreement, Gonzales will be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of at least 87 months and not more than 108 months. Thereafter, he will be required to serve a term of supervised release to be determined by the court. Gonzales also will be required to register as a sex offender after he completes his prison sentence. Gonzales was remanded into the custody of the U.S. Marshal’s Service after entering his guilty plea. He will be detained pending his sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Gonzales, 26, was a military recruiter employed by the U.S. Army who was stationed at the U.S. Army Recruiting Station in Midland, Tex., when he was arrested in Clovis, N.M., on May 2, 2012. According to the court filings, between April 24, 2012 and May 2, 2012, Gonzales used a computer and cellular phone to entice an individual whom he believed to be under 18 years of age to engage in sexual activity. On May 2, 2012, Gonzales traveled from Oklahoma, Okla., to Clovis, N.M., for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity with a person whom he believed to be a 12-year-old girl.

In his plea agreement, Gonzales acknowledged that he was arrested as the result of an undercover investigation by the Curry County Sheriff’s Office (CCSO). Gonzales admitted that, on April 24, 2012, he responded to an online advertisement placed by a CCSO undercover agent that was entitled, “CUTE/YOUNG IF AGE DOESN’T MATTER HIT ME UP,” in an E-mail that included two photos of himself. Gonzales’ E-mail initiated a stream of E-mail and texting communication during which the CCSO agent represented himself as a 12-year-old girl whose family would be relocating to Germany in two week, and Gonzales asked the “girl” to send him nude photos of herself in sexually explicit positions and discussed the sexual acts that he wanted to engage in with the “girl.” Gonzales also admitted that, on May 1, 2012, he sent a text to the CCSO agent indicating that he would be traveling to Clovis the following day for the purpose of having sex with the “girl.” On May 2, 2012, Gonzales arrived at a location in Clovis provided to him by the CCSO agent and was arrested.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Charlyn E. Rees is prosecuting the case, which was investigated by the CCSO and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The case also was brought as part of the New Mexico Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force whose mission it is to locate, track, and capture Internet child sexual predators and Internet child pornographers in New Mexico. There are 61 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies associated with the Task Force, which is funded by a grant administered by the New Mexico Attorney General's Office. Anyone with information relating to suspected child predators and suspected child abuse is encouraged to contact federal or local law enforcement.

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