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St. Croix Jury Convicts 65-Year-Old in Sex Trafficking Case, Possible Life Sentence Looms

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ST. CROIX — U.S. Attorney for the V.I. Delia L. Smith announced today that a St. Croix jury has convicted 65-year-old James Phillip of sex trafficking and transporting a minor for prostitution.

Following a week-long trial, the jury returned a guilty verdict. District Court Judge Wilma Lewis ordered Phillip to surrender to the custody of the U.S. Marshal Service on May 15, 2023, to begin serving his sentence.

"Sexual abuse impacts our entire community and exposes its victims to a lifetime of trauma. It is particularly heinous when sexual predators exploit our young children. I am therefore committed to prosecuting sex offenders to the fullest extent of the law in hopes of creating a safe community for our children," said U.S. Attorney Smith.

Court documents and evidence presented at trial revealed that Phillip and co-defendant Zayvon Acoy aided and abetted each other in the sex trafficking and transportation of the minor victim for the purpose of engaging in prostitution. The victim testified that in 2017, at the age of 17, she had a sexual relationship with Acoy, who was 27 at the time. She stated that Acoy physically abused her and forced her into prostitution because he needed money.

According to the victim's testimony, Acoy took her to Phillip's house on two occasions, where she had sex with Phillip while Acoy waited outside in his vehicle. After both encounters, Phillip paid Acoy \$250 for having sex with the victim. The victim eventually reported the incidents to local and federal law enforcement due to Acoy's abuse. Acoy pleaded guilty to sex trafficking of a minor on July 7, 2021, and was [sentenced to 10 years imprisonment](#) on February 14, 2022. Phillip now faces a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigation and the Virgin Islands Police Department and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Everard Potter and Evan Rikhye. "Homeland Security Investigations is committed to protecting the victims of sexual exploitation in our community. In this instance, HSI brought the violator to justice after investigating a delicate but complex case by demonstrating our expertise in victim advocacy which is required in handling minor victims of sexual assaults," said Assistant Special Agent in Charge Eugene Thomas.

This case was 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 CEOS, 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 <http://www.justice.gov/psc>.