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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

Child Pornography Victim Recruited Through Fortnite

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution today announced the arrest of a man accused of offenses related to unlawful sex with a minor including 22 counts of child pornography. Anthony Gene Thomas, 41, of Broward County, allegedly engaged in sexual activity with a minor and solicited pornographic photos and videos of the victim. According to the investigation, initiated by the Broward Sheriff's Office Internet Crimes Against Children Unit, Thomas first contacted the victim through the popular online game Fortnite. Authorities believe there could be as many as 20 additional victims.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, "This case is disturbing not only because it involves child pornography, but also because a popular online game was used to communicate with the victim. We have reason to believe there could be additional victims, and I am asking anyone with information about the recruiting of minors for child pornography, or any other type of sexual exploitation, to call law enforcement immediately.

"Additionally, parents need to know that predators will use any means possible to target and exploit a child. I am asking parents and guardians to please make sure you know who your children meet online, and talk to them about sexual predators."

According to the investigation, a co-conspirator made contact with the victims through the popular online game Fortnite. After developing a relationship with the victim, the co-conspirator then used Fortnite to introduce the victim to Thomas. While communicating through the online platform, the victim expressed hardships at home. In response, Thomas manipulated the victim with gifts, including credit cards and a cellphone to be in direct and primary communication with each other. The defendant and the co-conspirator eventually organized to pick up the 17-year-old to take the victim back to Thomas's residence.

On Aug. 25, 2018, Thomas and the co-conspirator transported the victim to Broward County. After arriving, Thomas allegedly engaged in sexual activity with the victim. The victim's parents called the police, declaring the minor missing. Police recovered and brought the victim back home on Aug. 26. Thomas and the victim remained in contact. On Oct. 11, law enforcement served a search warrant and seized the defendant's phone containing pornographic images and videos of the victim.

Attorney General Moody's Office of Statewide Prosecution, the Brevard County Sheriff's Office and the Broward Sheriff's Office continue to work together on this case. Thomas faces charges of soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computers, traveling to meet a minor for unlawful sexual activity, possession with intention to promote sexual performance of a child, 22 counts of child pornography and unlawful sexual activity with a minor. The charges are filed in

Brevard County where the victim resides.

Anyone with information about this case should call Broward County Detective Michael Joo at (954) 888-5241. Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Danielle Dudai will prosecute the case.