

AO 91 (Rev. 11/11) Criminal Complaint

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
for the
District of South Carolina

United States of America
v.
Johnny Thomas,
Becca Mills
Case No.

Defendant(s)

CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, the complainant in this case, state that the following is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

On or about the date(s) of March 18, 2019 in the county of Horry in the
District of South Carolina, the defendant(s) violated:

Table with 2 columns: Code Section, Offense Description. Row 1: Title 18 U.S.C. §§ 1591(a)(1), (a)(2), and (b)(2); Sex trafficking of children or by force, fraud, or coercion. Row 2: Title 18 U.S.C. §§ 2422(a) and (b); Coercion and enticement of an individual or minor into prostitution.

This criminal complaint is based on these facts:

See attached affidavit

Continued on the attached sheet.

Signature of Steven J. Michaels

Steven J. Michaels - Special Agent

Printed name and title

Sworn to before me and signed in my presence.

Date: 7/28/2021

Signature of Kaymani D. West

Kaymani D. West, United States Magistrate Judge

Printed name and title

City and state: Florence, South Carolina

**AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT**

1. I have been employed as a Special Agent since December 2003, for the Department of Homeland Security Homeland Security Investigations (DHS-HSI). I have a bachelor's degree in Business and a master's degree in Computer Information Systems. Prior to my employment with DHS ICE, I have over six years of experience working as an Import Customs Broker. I have over seventeen years of experience investigating crimes that involve the sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking. In addition to my formal education and work experience, I have graduated from the 10-week criminal investigator program (2004), and the 11-week DHS ICE Academy (2004) at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, GA. As part of my official duties as a DHS-HSI Agent, I am assigned to investigate violations of Customs and Immigration statutes as well as other law enforcement statutes.
2. On March 25, 2019, Minor Victim 1 (MV1) self-reported to the Myrtle Beach Police Department (MBPD) and advised she was a runaway. MBPD Officer Fee transported MV1 to the Department of Juvenile Justice Detention Center. At that time, MV1 disclosed to Officer Fee that MV1 believed she was sex trafficked. MV1 was then transported to the Grand Strand Regional Medical Center (GSRMC) for evaluation, and MBPD Investigator Tiffany Whitmire was notified. On the same date, Investigator Whitmire interviewed MV1. On June 24, 2021, I conducted a follow up interview of MV1.
3. MV1 stated on or about April 2019, she met a male subject by the name of "Rico" on the chatting video application "Monkey." MV1 stated she began to communicate to "Rico" via phone and text messaging shortly after the video chat. MV1 stated their conversation continued for several weeks. MV1 stated she told "Rico" she was 16 years old. MV1 stated she was 15 years old at the time of the conversation, but since she was close to her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, she told "Rico" she was 16. MV1 stated she discussed with "Rico" about running away from her grandmother's house where she was currently living.
4. MV1 stated that on or about March 18, 2019, MV1 made arrangements with "Rico" to pick her up at the Rich Gas Station in Clarksburg, WV. MV1 stated she met "Rico" at the gas station at approximately 2:00 a.m. MV1 stated that her friend drove her to the meeting location. MV1 stated her friend knew she planned to leave with "Rico." MV1 stated

“Rico” and her friend had a conversation about meeting up at a later date. MV1 stated “Rico” then drove her to an unknown apartment in Richmond, Virginia.

5. MV1 stated THOMAS’s name on Facebook was “Lulu Panama.” Investigator Whitmire was able to review the Facebook page for “Lulu Panama.” MV1 confirmed the subject associated with the Facebook account found by Investigator Whitmire was the subject she knew as “Rico.” Investigator Whitmire was able to positively identify the subject as Johnny THOMAS, based on previous interaction with THOMAS.
6. MV1 stated in Richmond, VA, she met Minor Victim 2 (MV2) and another female named Becky MILLS. MV1 stated that MV1, THOMAS, MV2, and MILLS all checked into a room at the Days Inn. MV1 stated she was advised by MILLS and MV2 that THOMAS would not hurt MV1 if MV1 did what she was told.
7. MV1 stated that at some point after checking into the room, MV2 and Mills left to make “plays.”<sup>1</sup> MV1 stated she and THOMAS had sex at the hotel after the others had left. MV1 stated that at one point while being alone with THOMAS, THOMAS held MV1’s face and made her breathe in what she believed to be cocaine. MV1 stated THOMAS told her it was to “wake her up” after he got angry at MV1 for being tired.
8. MV1 stated MV2 and MILLS later returned to the hotel with a large amount of money. MV1 stated it was explained to her that the two girls would have sex in exchange for money. MV1 stated THOMAS wanted MV1 to have sex for money. MV1 stated she told THOMAS that this was not something she wanted to do. MV1 stated THOMAS told her that if it was not something she wanted to do, he would “sell her.”
9. MV1 stated that after the first day at the hotel, she woke up early and attempted to quietly leave while everyone was asleep. MV1 stated she made it several steps out the door when THOMAS physically grabbed her and dragged her back into the room. MV1 stated THOMAS said, “you’re my bitch, where do you think you’re going?”
10. MV1 stated that the next day, she and the other subjects all drove to Fayetteville, NC. MV1 stated that in Fayetteville, NC, photos were taken of her, and she was posted in an ad for commercial sex. MV1 stated that the photos for the commercial sex ads were taken by MV2 and MILLS using THOMAS’s cell phone which MV1 believe to be a Samsung. MV1 stated that she was posed in several different positions to include standing

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<sup>1</sup> “Play” is a slang term for commercial sex acts.

covering her chest and bending over. MV1 stated she believed three to four pictures were taken of her.

11. MV1 stated that she received an "outcall"<sup>2</sup> and met a male subject at a room in the Knight's Inn and had sex with him in exchange for money. MV1 stated that later, she and MV2 both had sex in exchange for money with a male subject. MV1 stated that at some point, the male subject began choking MV1 and she passed out. MV1 stated she woke up in a shower and was bleeding from her vaginal area.
12. MV1 stated THOMAS was posting commercial sex ads, and THOMAS told MV1 he was MV1's "pimp." MV1 stated that she and MILLS did several other "outcalls" that took place at apartment complexes. MV1 stated she believed she stayed in Fayetteville, NC, for approximately two days. MV1 stated that during this period of time, her friend came to meet the group. MV1 stated that her friend had a very bad drug habit and THOMAS had agreed to give her friend drugs in exchange for her friend driving the group.
13. MV1 stated that during this period of time, the group began to worry that the police could be looking for MV1 because she was a runaway. MV1 stated that THOMAS conducted a google search of her name. MV1 stated the search revealed a missing poster for MV1 which listed her age as 15. MV1 stated that THOMAS became extremely angry at MV1 for lying about her age.
14. MV1 stated her friend drove her, THOMAS, MILLS, and MV2 from Fayetteville, NC, to Myrtle Beach, SC. MV1 stated that on the first day in Myrtle Beach, SC, the group traveled to a lot of houses to purchase and sell illegal narcotics to include cocaine, marijuana, and ecstasy.
15. MV1 stated THOMAS told her that they were going to "run some plays." MV1 stated she told THOMAS she was sick, bleeding, and tired. MV1 stated that THOMAS responded by telling MV1 he was going to "sell her."
16. MV1 stated she was instructed by THOMAS to go to a store to have sex with a male subject. MV1 stated she believed the male subject to be an employee of the store. MV1 stated THOMAS bought her shoes and clothing in exchange for having sex at the store.
17. MV1 stated that while MV2 and Mills were on an outcall at a hotel, she was waiting in the car with THOMAS. MV1 stated that at one point during the conversation, THOMAS

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<sup>2</sup> "Outcall" refers to a commercial sex transaction which takes place at the buyer's location.

became angry at MV1 and forced MV1 to have sex with him. MV1 stated that after that occurred, MV1 and THOMAS went for a walk on the beach. MV1 stated THOMAS began coaching MV1 on what to do and not to do. MV1 stated THOMAS told her to “not look anyone in the eyes” and to “address him as daddy.”

18. MV1 stated that early in the morning of the next day at approximately 3 a.m., she made an outcall at the Red Roof Inn in Myrtle Beach, SC. MV1 stated she performed sex acts on a male subject in exchange for \$80.
19. MV1 stated THOMAS told her numerous times if she did not perform commercial sex acts and make money for him that he would sell her, and that THOMAS would sell her to someone worse than him. MV1 stated THOMAS said people would chain her up to a bed, shoot her full of heroin, and do “bad” things to her. MV1 stated THOMAS told her he could get \$1500 for selling her. MV1 stated THOMAS told her this person would slice her toes and body parts off.
20. On March 26, 2019, Investigator Whitmire, using a law enforcement tool, was able to find commercial sex ads for MV1, MV2, and Mills. There were approximately 6 advertisements posted on the website “skipthegames.com”<sup>3</sup> for MV1. MV1 was able to positively identify herself in the pictures associated with the advertisements, and she indicated they were the pictures which were taken in Fayetteville, NC, by MILLS and MV2. The photos were also as described by MV1 in her interview. Additionally, the phone number listed on the advertisement was 702-845-4285. The investigation revealed this number was associated with a phone utilized by THOMAS. A search was conducted of the phone associated with this number. The search revealed THOMAS sending messages to multiple people, to include MILLS and MV2, indicating it was THOMAS’s new phone number.
21. Investigator Whitmire was able to locate approximately 26 advertisements for MILLS and MV2 on the website “skipthegames.com.” The advertisements included images that were a positive match for MILLS and MV2. The advertisements were placed in the cities of Raleigh, NC; Richmond, VA; Fayetteville, NC; and Myrtle Beach, SC. The advertisements ran from March 18, 2019, through March 24, 2019. Additionally, the phone number listed

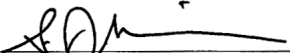
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<sup>3</sup> Skipthegames.com is an internet website offering free classified advertisements for commercial sex services.

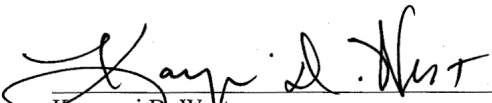
- on most of the advertisements was 702-845-4285, the number previously identified as being associated with THOMAS.
22. On March 26, 2019, the MBPD issued a state arrest warrant for THOMAS, who was subsequently arrested in Rockingham, NC.
  23. On the same date, Rock Hill Police Department Detectives interviewed MILLS after she was encountered during the arrest of THOMAS. MILLS stated she had known THOMAS for approximately two years from the date of the interview. MILLS stated that she used to live with THOMAS in Durham, NC.
  24. MILLS stated she met MV2 through THOMAS approximately 2-3 weeks from the date of the interview and that THOMAS and MV2 were friends. MILLS stated she knew MV2 was 17 years old. MILLS stated she met MV2 at a gas station and THOMAS was present. MILLS stated she told MV2 about how she used to “dance” and how it was a quick way to get money.
  25. MILLS stated that she and MV2 engaged in multiple commercial sex acts together in North Carolina. MILLS stated MV2 was too scared to engage in commercial sex acts by herself. MILLS stated MV2 was always with MILLS when engaging in commercial sex acts. MILLS stated THOMAS would always stay close by, and they could call him if needed. MILLS stated everyone shared the money made from the commercial sex acts.
  26. On the same date, MILLS gave a consent to search her cell phone, which she had on her person, and gave consent to search her residence. The search of MILLS’s residence located the phone associated with THOMAS using the aforementioned phone number of 702-845-4285.
  27. The RHPD then conducted a forensic extraction of the data on MILLS’s cell phone. The data revealed that on March 20, 2019, MILLS sent 3 images of MV1 to THOMAS’s cell phone. These images were a positive match for the images that appeared in commercial sex ads for MV1. The data also revealed multiple text messages making arrangements for commercial sex with many instances referring to a “two-girl special.”
  28. On April 29, 2019, the MBPD issued an arrest warrant for MILLS for the prostitution of a minor and human trafficking in violation of South Carolina state law. On June 17, 2019, MILLS was taken into custody by the MBPD.

29. Based upon the foregoing, there is probable cause to believe that Johnny THOMAS and Becca MILLS on or about March 18, 2019, and continuing through on or about March 24, 2019, did violate Title 18 U.S.C. §§ 1591(a)(1), (a)(2), and (b)(2), in that they knowingly, in and affecting interstate commerce, did recruit, entice, harbor, transport, provide, obtain, and maintain by any means, a person, namely "MV1" and "MV2," and did benefit financially by receiving anything of value from participation in a venture engaged in such acts, knowing and recklessly disregarding the fact that means of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion, or any combination of such means would be used to cause "MV1" and "MV2" to engage in a commercial sex act, and knowing, recklessly disregarding, and having had a reasonable opportunity to observe that "MV1" and "MV2" had not attained the age of 18 years and would be caused to engage in a commercial sex act.
30. Additionally, based upon the foregoing, there is probable cause to believe that Johnny THOMAS and Becca MILLS, on or about March 18, 2019, and continuing through on or about March 24, 2019, did violate 18 U.S.C. §§ 2422(a) and (b) in that they knowingly persuaded, induced, enticed, or coerced individuals to travel in interstate or foreign commerce to engage in prostitution and, using any facility or means of interstate or foreign commerce, knowingly persuaded, induced, enticed, or coerced individuals who had not attained the age of 18 years to engage in prostitution.
31. Assistant United States Attorneys Derek A. Shoemake and Lauren L. Hummel have reviewed this affidavit and concurred with this request.

This, the 28<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2021.

  
Steven J. Michaels  
Special Agent  
Homeland Security Investigations

Sworn and subscribed to me this the 28 day of July, 2021.

  
Kaymani D. West  
United States Magistrate Judge