

Florida Cop Once Named 'Officer Of The Year' Arrested For Allegedly Distributing Child Porn

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2015 Cop Pedophile Michael Harding

A Florida officer once named "Officer of the Year" was arrested for allegedly distributing child pornography, including when he was on the job, authorities said.

Michael Harding - a 27-year-old married cop with the City of Port St. Lucie Police Department - was charged on Wednesday with sending and receiving child porn after undercover Homeland Security investigators discovered explicit material he allegedly posted on the app Kik messenger, according to an affidavit.

Harding reportedly posted to the Kik chatroom "#toddlerf****" while assigned to his police vehicle on patrol on the overnight shift on July 23. He uploaded posts that depicted young girls in sex acts with men and alone, according to an affidavit by a Homeland Security special agent.

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) special agents linked the account to Harding's home IP address and cell phone number, according to the affidavit, which stated the IP log indicated that from July 22 to August 15, the account was accessed 33 times.

HSI special agents executed a federal search warrant at Harding's home on Tuesday and seized his computer, cell phone and thumb drive, along with other materials, officials said.

A preliminary forensic analysis revealed the seized items contained hundreds of images and videos of children engaged in sexually explicit conduct, according to authorities.

One thumb drive, which was stashed in a gun case in Harding's bedroom, stored hundreds of child porn photos and videos, the affidavit said. Another recovered thumb drive showed 23 sexually explicit pictures had been deleted, investigators claim.

According to reports, the 27-year-old married father was taken into custody Tuesday and he was appointed a public defender Wednesday after telling a judge he had \$3,000 in his bank account, the New York Daily News wrote.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Frank J. Lynch ordered that Harding be held without bond pending a detention hearing Sept. 30 at 9:30 a.m., authorities said.

If convicted, Harding faces up to 20 years in prison and would be required to register as a sex offender in any jurisdiction in which he lives, officials said.

Harding was placed on administrative leave without pay pending an investigation after his arrest.

He was named Officer of the Year while working for the Fort Pierce Police Department in 2011.

He quit that police force to work for Port St. Lucie in Aug. 2012, leaving Fort Pierce without providing proper notice of his resignation and in poor standing, according to the New York Daily News. Before he left Fort Pierce, he reportedly received counseling twice for not checking or completing online trainings.

This investigation was conducted under HSI's Operation Predator, an international initiative that works to protect children from sexual predators. Through the initiative, more than 10,000 arrests have been made for crimes against children since 2003.

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