

Facing child porn charges, retired FBI agent wants contact with grandkids

[Stephen Hudak](#)



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A now retired FBI agent, charged with 30 counts of possessing child pornography, wants supervised contact with his grandchildren.

Kenneth Bensman, 64, who lives near Mount Dora, was released from the Lake County Jail on \$35,000 bond following his arrest July 11 on seven

counts of possessing child pornography. Pre-trial release restrictions for Bensman, whose wife, Elizabeth, also works with the FBI, included a prohibition against having contact with minors or using the internet.

Prosecutors added 23 more counts of possessing child pornography Aug. 1. Each is punishable by up to five years in prison.

His lawyer, Mark Conan of Orlando, asked Circuit Judge G. Richard Singeltary to relax the pre-trial restrictions in a court motion filed earlier this month.

Conan noted Bensman has no prior criminal record, two adult children and five grandchildren, all age 5 or younger, including an infant. They live out of state.

He argued the restrictions were "overbroad and vague."

The defense lawyer asked Singeltary to allow Bensman supervised contact with the grandchildren, either in person or via a video-chat service like Facetime or Skype.

Prosecutors objected, said Walter Forgie, supervisory attorney in charge of the State Attorney's Office in Lake County.

Conan said the career FBI agent wouldn't be alone with his grandchildren during personal or virtual visits.

The defense lawyer said Elizabeth Bensman, who is assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force in Central Florida, testified she would always be in the room for visits.

Although he heard her testimony Aug. 15, Singeltary has not yet ruled on the motion. He has not yet scheduled a date to finish the hearing or hand

down his decision.

Agents from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Cyber Crimes Task Force used a search warrant in July to seize computers and a hard-drive from Bensman's home office while investigating the exchange of child pornography over the internet.

Investigators alleged they found digital files of pictures and videos showing pre-pubescent children — some as young as 5 — in sex acts or posing naked with adults and other children.

Questioned by agents, Bensman first denied then admitted using used peer-to-peer software and search terms such as "young" and "PTHC" to find the sexual images.

He told investigators he had used both search terms but didn't know what it stood for.

"PTHC" is an acronym for pre-teen hardcore.

In a recorded interview with FDLE agents, Bensman said he recently had a "come to Jesus moment" and threw a computer hard drive containing downloaded images of children into a lake behind his home because he knew viewing and keeping the videos and pictures was morally wrong, according to the sheriff's report of the FDLE cyber search.

He said they would need a dive team to find it.

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But agents then found a hard drive plugged into a computer monitor in Bensman's home office and confronted him with it, the report said.

The report alleged Bensman admitted the hard drive was the device he used to collect and store the images of children he had downloaded from the web.

He later told an FDLE agent he had considered destroying the hard drive several times "but just could not bring himself to do it."

According to a document summarizing his statements to investigators, Bensman said he downloaded the images because he was curious.

He also said he never had inappropriate contact with anyone under 18.

shudak@orlandosentinel.com or 407-650-6361



Stephen Hudak often writes about bears in Central Florida and weird things in the Orlando area, including Orange County government. He likes snow and Ohio State but wound up in the Sunshine State, which has been good to him. He was a Pulitzer finalist for work on the FAMU hazing tragedy.

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