

PRESS RELEASE

Seann Pietila Pleads Guilty For Making Violent, Antisemitic Threats

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U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Michigan

U.S. Attorney Mark Totten renews commitment to prevent, disrupt, and prosecute illegal acts of hate fueled by antisemitism, Islamophobia, or anti-Arab bias

https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdmi/pr/2023_1113_Seann_Pietila_Plea_Agreement

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN — U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Michigan Mark Totten today announced that Seann Pietila, 19, of Pickford, Michigan, pleaded guilty to a federal charge for violent threats he made online. Pietila admitted sending multiple messages on Instagram about planning to commit a mass shooting targeting Jewish people. Sentencing will occur at 10 a.m. on March 4, 2024.

"No one should face violent threats because of their race, ethnicity, religion, or any other status" said **U.S. Attorney Mark Totten**. "At this moment of increased threats across the nation, we renew our commitment to prevent, disrupt, and prosecute illegal acts of hate fueled by antisemitism, Islamophobia, or anti-Arab bias."

U.S. Attorney Totten and the FBI provided brief comments after today's plea hearing, available on the [U.S. Attorney's Facebook Page](#).

Pietila pleaded guilty to transmitting threatening communications in interstate commerce. The maximum penalty under that statute is five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and three years of supervised release. Additionally, as a convicted felon, he may no longer possess any firearms.

As outlined in the initial criminal complaint, Pietila is alleged to have communicated with others on Instagram where he discussed his plans to commit acts of violence to kill other people and specifically referenced Jewish people. His communications demonstrated sympathy with neo-Nazi ideology, antisemitism, and past mass shooters. Law enforcement searched Pietila's residence and seized various items, including ammunition, magazines, a shotgun, a rifle, a pistol, various knives,

firearms accessories, tactical vests, mask, a Nazi flag, a ghillie suit, gas masks, and military sniper/survival manuals. A note found on Pietila's phone identified a particular synagogue in East Lansing, a date, and a list of equipment. A copy of the indictment can be viewed [here](#). The criminal complaint and plea agreement are attached.



"When free speech crosses a line and becomes a threat of violence against another, the full investigative resources of the FBI will be deployed," said **Cheyvoryea Gibson, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Michigan**. "Thanks to the coordinated efforts of our state and local law enforcement partners, we were able to disrupt the defendant before he could put his plans into action. The FBI continues to urge the public to report suspicious or threatening behavior to their local law enforcement or by calling 1-800-CALL-FBI or submitting a tip online at <https://tips.fbi.gov>."

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris O'Connor and investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI was assisted by the Chippewa County Sheriff's Office, TRI-County Drug Enforcement Team (TRIDENT), Upper

Peninsula Substance Enforcement Team (UPSET), and Michigan State Police Emergency Services Team.

Given the heightened threat environment, over the past several weeks U.S. Attorney Totten has met with leaders of the Jewish and Muslim communities throughout the Western District of Michigan. The purpose of these meetings is to better understand what is happening on the ground and how the U.S. Attorney's Office, working with its law enforcement partners, can better support the affected communities. This outreach is ongoing.

In addition, to help combat hate-fueled violence, U.S. Attorney Mark Totten recently announced the [formation of a Civil Rights Team](#) focused on enforcing federal civil rights laws across the Western District of Michigan, as well as conducting regular community outreach regarding civil rights and hate crimes.

The Civil Rights Team includes federal prosecutors and staff from the Office's Criminal and Civil Divisions who will focus on criminal matters such as hate crimes and unlawful threats, as well as civil matters such as enforcing federal civil rights laws regarding discrimination, disability access, environmental justice, sexual harassment, voting rights, and other matters. The team will work closely with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division and coordinate with other Department components and local, state, federal, and tribal agencies as needed.

U.S. Attorney Totten also announced the Department's [United Against Hate Initiative](#), part of a nationwide effort by the U.S. Department of Justice aimed at combatting unlawful acts of hate. The program consists of ongoing local forums that connect community groups to federal, state, and local law enforcement to increase community understanding and reporting of hate crimes; build trust between law enforcement and communities; and create and strengthen alliances between law enforcement and other government partners and community groups to combat unlawful acts of hate.

Anyone wishing to report a civil rights violation related to voting, housing, employment, education, the workplace, business, healthcare, or other public spaces can call the Office's Civil Rights Hotline at 616-808-2195 or email usamiw.civilrights@usdoj.gov. Individuals reporting a hate crime or criminal threat can call the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI. Anyone facing imminent harm should call 911.

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