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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Western District of Washington

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Seattle man sentenced to four years in prison for attempting to travel to the Middle East to join a foreign terrorist organization

Seattle – A 22-year-old Seattle man was sentenced today in U.S. District Court in Seattle to four years in prison with 15 years of supervised release to follow, for Providing Material Support to a Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, announced U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. Elvin Hunter Bgorn Williams was arrested May 28, 2021, at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on criminal charges related to his alleged efforts to join the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), a designated foreign terrorist organization, to engage in violent acts of terrorism in the Middle East or the United States. At today's sentencing hearing, U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour said he was imposing a sentence far below the government's request of 15 years because of Williams' "mental health and history of mental health difficulties."

"Mr. Williams persisted in his plans to join a terrorist organization and commit acts of violence, despite intervention from his family, his school, members of his mosque, and from the FBI," said U.S. Attorney Nick Brown. "Indeed, he repeatedly stated his intention to commit an act of terror here at home if he could not travel overseas. Mr. Williams continues to pose a risk to the community. It will be critically important that he be closely supervised after he is released from prison."

Williams was arrested following a lengthy investigation into his efforts to join ISIS.

"Mr. Williams proved by his actions he was willing to join the Islamic State in hopes of furthering their ideology through violence," said Richard A. Collodi, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Seattle field office. "He took concrete steps to fund his activities, procure equipment, and travel to the Middle East. I am grateful for how law enforcement was able to step in and stop him before he actually was able to achieve his goal."

According to the plea agreement, in November 2020, Williams began telling family members he was a member of ISIS. Williams posted a video on Facebook in which he swore an oath of loyalty to a leader of ISIS.

Using confidential sources close to Williams, the FBI monitored his activity and became aware of his efforts to travel to the Middle East and join ISIS. Williams expressed to his associates that if he could not travel overseas, he would commit an attack in the U.S. on behalf of ISIS. Williams began communicating with those he believed were ISIS recruiters who could get him to an ISIS terror cell in the Middle East or other parts of the world.

The plea agreement contains statements Williams made about his intentions: that he sought martyrdom, had “no problem with killing,” and hoped to be involved in beheading others.

In May 2021, Williams obtained a passport and pawned a laptop computer to raise funds for his travel. In early May 2021, Williams booked an airline ticket from Seattle to Amsterdam and on to Egypt to join ISIS. On Friday May 28, 2021, he went to Sea-Tac Airport to catch the first leg of his international flight. Williams was arrested at the departure gate.

In asking the court for a 15-year sentence prosecutors wrote to the court, “Sadly, this case is far from unique. ISIS and other terrorist groups engage in the recruitment of would-be supporters using online propaganda communication tools. Far too many U.S. persons fall prey to this recruitment and attempt to travel to fight with terrorist groups overseas or seek to commit local attacks in the name of terrorist organizations.”

The case was investigated by the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force in Seattle with assistance from the King County Sheriff’s Office; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Homeland Security Investigations; Federal Air Marshals; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; U.S Marshals Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Transportation Security Administration; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Naval Criminal Investigative Service; Seattle Police Department; Bellevue Police Department; and Port of Seattle Police Department.

Assistant United States Attorney Todd Greenberg of the Western District of Washington’s Terrorism and Violent Crime Unit, and Trial Attorney Andrew Sigler of the National Security Division’s Counterterrorism Section are prosecuting the case.

Topic(s):

Counterterrorism
Domestic Terrorism

Component(s):

USAO - Washington, Western

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