

Police chief of New York town arrested on child pornography charges

By Leigh Remizowski and Pamela Brown, CNN
updated 12:06 PM EST, Fri January 24, 2014

cnn.com

(CNN) -- The police chief of Mount Pleasant, New York, was arrested Thursday on charges of possession of child pornography, authorities said.

Brian Fanelli, 54, was arrested at his home in upstate Mahopac after a months-long investigation by federal officials, said James Hayes, Jr., special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in New York.

The chief allegedly used a peer-to-peer file sharing program to download more than 120 images and videos of child pornography, prosecutors said.

Fanelli was released on \$50,000 bond Thursday evening, according to CNN affiliate WCBS. A judge ordered him to home confinement with electronic monitoring. His computers and guns were confiscated, WCBS reported.

Investigators identified Fanelli in October 2013 while investigating peer-to-peer networks being used to download sexually explicit content.

"We moved rather swiftly given his prominence in the community, his trust that had been placed upon him by those in the community and his close relationships with the community," Hayes told CNN.

As police executed a search warrant at his home Thursday, Fanelli voluntarily told investigators that he began viewing child pornography about one year ago. Fanelli told investigators that he first started collecting the child porn as research for a sexual abuse awareness program he taught to elementary and middle-school students. But he said he later continued downloading it for personal interest, according to the office of U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Preet Bharara.

Fanelli had worked for the police department in Mount Pleasant, a town about 30 miles north of New York City, since November 1981, according to Joan Maybury, the town supervisor.

He has been suspended as chief, a post he took in November -- one month after he became the target of the child porn investigation.

"The fact of the matter is the general public impression of people who commit these crimes is [that of] an unemployed pervert in his mother's basement," Hayes said. "That's not our experience. We're finding that the people who commit these crimes are educated professionals, people in many different fields, and unfortunately this is not the first law enforcement officer that we've arrested for this crime."

Homeland Security investigators have been more involved in child pornography cases in recent years because they often involve the transmission of sexually explicit images of children from outside the United States, Hayes said.

Fanelli faces a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison and a maximum fine of \$250,000 if convicted, according to the statement.

© 2014 Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. All Rights Reserved.