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Charlottesville mother arrested on child porn, attempted exploitation charges

Hawes Spencer Apr 5, 2023 7



Hoppe



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Hawes Spencer

A Charlottesville mother who worked in and supported child advocacy organizations has been arrested and indicted on federal allegations that she traveled to Northern Virginia to sexually abuse a child.

The 45-year-old mother of two, Eleanor Beaumont Hunton Hoppe, was arrested on M

enticement of a minor and attempted transportation of a minor with attempt to engage in sexual activity.

Each charge is a felony, with one charge prescribing a prison sentence up to 15 years and another carrying a sentence ranging from 10 years to life.

“It’s a strong and serious case,” veteran Charlottesville defense attorney Dave Heilberg told The Daily Progress. “She’s in some real serious trouble.”

Hoppe pleaded not guilty on Tuesday during a video hearing conducted in the federal district court for the District of Columbia. There, the court records repeatedly list her name as Eleanor Hunter Hoppe.

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However, she grew up as Eleanor Beaumont Hunton, scion of the family that founded Hunton Andrews Kurth, Richmond’s largest law firm. With over 900 attorneys, the firm’s history includes the late Lewis F. Powell Jr. who served on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Hoppe’s own history includes a former marriage to Joel Hoppe, a magistrate judge hearing federal cases in Charlottesville and other courtrooms in the Western District of Virginia. Their union produced two school-age girls, according to sources.

According to the government’s case against Eleanor Hoppe, a Washington, D.C.-based undercover FBI officer entered a fetish website in late February and conversed on an encrypted app with a woman who allegedly wanted to chat about “taboo parenting.”

According to the prosecution, Eleanor Hoppe allegedly sent a topless photograph of herself to the undercover officer to prove she was “safe” and then sent a video of an adult male penetrating the vagina of an apparent minor with his penis.

She then volunteered to travel to participate in abuse of what she was told was the man’s 8-year-old daughter, according to the prosecution.



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“A great think to do is to wake her up by trying new things,” Eleanor Hoppe allegedly told the undercover officer. “I’ll be there for you. I’ll be there for you. I’ll be there for you.”

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Things reportedly escalated on March 16, the day of the planned rendezvous at a Warrenton motel.

Eleanor Hoppe reportedly sent three more images of adult males violating girls as well as a photograph of a pink silk robe she would bring to the rendezvous along with this alleged message: “Her big girl robe for tonight.”

“I’ll be [there] as soon as I can and I’ll get naked to,” she allegedly texted.

FBI special agent Emily Ekert wrote what happened next: “Upon arrival at the hotel, Hoppe was placed under arrest.”

Ekert wrote that Eleanor Hoppe waived her Miranda rights against self-incrimination to explain that she was trying to prevent the exploitation of a child. However, the agent noted that a search of Hoppe’s vehicle turned up a pink children’s tote bag containing silk undergarments, lubricant and a pink silk robe.



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In 2019, Hoppe was found guilty in absentia in Chesterfield County General District Court of “undressing where prohibited” after an incident that occurred that autumn. However, she appealed the case to circuit court and got the charge dismissed.

The federal indictment has sent shockwaves through the local child welfare community.

“My gosh. I had no idea,” said Athena Gould, the executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Central Blue Ridge, when informed of Hoppe’s arrest.

Gould said that Eleanor Hoppe passed a thorough background check and left the employ of the organization about three years ago. Gould said that she worked only in special events, not with children.

Eleanor Hoppe's recent work also included time as an event planner at the University of Virginia.

UVa did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.

With her ex-husband, Hoppe has donated to Foothills Child Advocacy Center, a child abuse prevention organization. And according to Hoppe’s LinkedIn page, she served two years as a victim’s advocate in the office of the Richmond commonwealth’s attorney about two decades ago.



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The federal court file indicates that Eleanor Hoppe has been committed to the custody of the attorney general and denied bail. Records indicate she is being held at the Central Detention Facility in D.C. Her defense attorney, Ned Smock, with the Office of th

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For Heilberg, no case involving child pornography ends well for a defendant.

“Once the judge sees one of these images, the case is almost over,” said Heilberg. “About the only defense left is some sort of mental status, something that would mitigate the sentence.”



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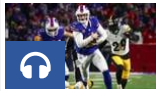
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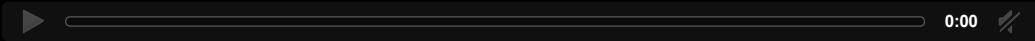
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Eleanor Hoppe has been refusing to consider a plea deal

Hawes Spencer Dec 15, 2023 1



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Eleanor Hoppe, the Albemarle County socialite, mother of two and ex-wife of a federal judge accused of child sex crimes, has been refusing to respond to a prosecutor's offer to let her plead guilty to a single charge and has instead demanded pretrial release. But during a Thursday hearing, the government again denied bail, according to the court record.

"She wants to be let out of jail, but nobody's going to let her out of jail," Charlottesville-based legal analyst David Heilberg told The Daily Progress.



LOCAL NEWS
How did an alleged pedophile slip through the cracks?
Hawes Spencer

The 45-year old woman born Eleanor Beaumont Hunton stands accused of attempting to help someone she thought was a father eager for lessons in molesting his 8-year-old daughter. It turned out to be a sting conducted by the FBI, and Hoppe has been incarcerated since her mid-March arrest in Northern Virginia.

In support of her quest for pretrial release, Hoppe asserted that she wasn't receiving proper daily medications behind bars and requested placement into the custody of an aunt, because she is not "particularly dangerous," according to a court filing.

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Hoppe

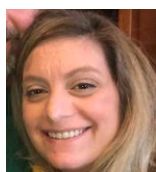
However, the prosecutor has repeatedly urged incarceration and supplied the court with a set of allegations detailing electronic communications said to have started with a chatroom discussion of so-called "taboo parenting."

On March 7, a user named Titotori, a "trusted member" of a fetish forum, wrote the following on a still extant posting:

"Hey! Im a single mom raising two daughters in a very open mother daughter relationship. Im hoping to connect with similar families in VA through this forum.... Would be amazing to find a Father figure to make our family complete."

The prosecutor alleges that Hoppe used the screenname Titotori and that initial online discussions led her to send encrypted messages — including pornographic videos and images depicting underage children — to the FBI agent who stung her by posing as a perverted father offering to meet at a Warrenton motel.

"Remember this is a special daddy daughter night no clothes needed," Hoppe allegedly messaged the agent. "I'll be the[r]e as soon as I can and I'll get naked to[o]."



LOCAL NEWS

Charlottesville mother arrested on child porn, attempted exploitation charges

Hawes Spencer



When Hoppe was arrested at the motel on March 16, she was allegedly in possession of lubricant and a pink child's garment matching the "big girl robe for tonight" that she promised in prior messages.

The lurid details have sent shockwaves through the nonprofit child-assistance organizations where Hoppe donated, volunteered and occasionally worked in the Charlottesville area. There has, however, been no evidence that Hoppe was alone with local children in her roles with those organizations.



CRIME

Details emerge regarding Eleanor Hoppe's previous arrest

Hawes Spencer

Hoppe, a University of Virginia graduate and former paralegal whose marriage to federal magistrate Judge Joel Hoppe ended more than two years ago, told arresting officers that she went to Warrenton to stop a molestation.

Heilberg, the legal analyst, noted that the government's evidence doesn't point to any actual sexual contact with juveniles and suggests that Hoppe, whose mental woes were noted during her divorce, may be quietly pressing for leniency on psychological grounds.



Judge Joel Hoppe attends the 61st annual Independence Day and Naturalization Ceremony at Monticello on Tuesday, July 4, 2023.

CAL CARY, THE DAILY PROGRESS

"A lot of times when you have psychiatric evidence, you file it under seal to protect the client's

confidentiality,” Heilberg said in explanation of the lack of any publicly available motion for a mental evaluation.

Educated at St. Catherine’s, a private school for girls in Richmond, and raised in the family that founded Richmond’s largest law firm, Hoppe has nonetheless opted for a public defender to fight the three federal charges she now faces, which include child pornography and attempted transportation of a minor.



CRIME

Charlottesville-area socialite accused of child sex crimes Eleanor Hoppe considers plea deal

Hawes Spencer

While the government has attempted to drop the two lesser charges, its offer demands a guilty plea to the third and most serious charge: enticement of a minor, which carries a mandatory 10-year minimum with no ceiling.

“It’s only a single count, but it’s 10 years to life,” Heilberg said. “That might explain why she might be nonresponsive or in denial.”



CRIME

Charlottesville socialite charged with child sex crimes secures new lawyer, hearing date

Hawes Spencer

Thursday’s hearing took place in federal district court in Washington, where a judge considered the request of prosecutor Caroline Burrell to examine Hoppe’s medical records in order to respond to her motion claiming inadequate treatment and demanding release before trial.

“The government therefore seeks an Order from the Court directing [Department of Corrections] to provide undersigned counsel with information regarding the course of the defendant’s medication regimen while she has been in the custody of DOC,” Burrell wrote.



CHARLOTTESVILLE NEWS

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Judge Rudolph Contreras agreed and, according to the court record, directed the prosecutor to share the information with the defense as soon as she receives it. According to a person familiar with the proceedings, the prosecutor agreed to extend Hoppe’s deadline for responding to the plea deal, which had been set to expire Thursday.

The two sides are slated to meet in court again Jan. 19.

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The recent arrest of a prominent local woman on child pornography and enticement charges continues to send shockwaves through the community.

While Charlottesville and Albemarle County courts deal each year with a handful of male child pornography users, a woman accused of such crimes is much rarer. “This is way, way an outlier,” retired forensic psychologist Jeffrey Fracher told The Daily Progress. “In 45 years, I could probably count them on one hand.”

Scion of a noted family of lawyers and the former wife of a federal judge, 45-year-old Eleanor Hunton Hoppe was arrested on March 20 and charged with federal crimes that could put her away for life: distribution of child pornography, enticement of a minor and attempted transportation of a minor to engage in sexual activity.



Hoppe

Hoppe has pleaded not guilty to each charge, and she told the federal district court in Washington, D.C., that her father, lawyer Eppa Hunton V, would willingly serve as her pretrial custodian. In an April 18 order, however, U.S. Magistrate Judge Zia M. Faruqui ordered Hoppe be held without bail.

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“The government has proven by clear and convincing evidence that no condition or combination of conditions of release will reasonably assure the safety of any other person and the community,” Faruqui ruled.

Reached by telephone on Monday, Eppa Hunton V declined to discuss his daughter’s case.

“I’m not inclined to comment,” he told The Daily Progress. “I’m not going to cooperate,” he said, citing previous news coverage of his daughter’s arrest.

His daughter is accused of messaging someone she found in a fetish chatroom and offering to drive to Northern Virginia to sexually abuse an 8-year-old girl. The online correspondent turned out to be an FBI agent posing as a perverted father, and the little girl never existed. When Hoppe allegedly drove up to a Warrenton motel with sexual lubricant and silky pajamas packed in a child’s tote bag, she was arrested, authorities said.

The elder Hunton traces his legal pedigree back several generations to the founding of what is now Richmond's largest law firm, the 900-strong Hunton Andrews Kurth. A solo practitioner, Hunton represented his daughter in a 2019 misdemeanor case in which she was convicted in general district court but ultimately absolved in circuit court on a charge of "undressing where prohibited."



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The case stemmed from an incident at Pocahontas State Park in Chesterfield County. The complainant in that case, Kevin Faubion, the park's former assistant manager, now manages Twin Lakes State Park and said he was not permitted to discuss the case. And emails to the chief of the state's parks department's public safety and law enforcement staff, Scott A. Vantrease, were not returned.

Chesterfield's commonwealth's attorney, Stacey T. Davenport, downplayed the misdemeanor charge.

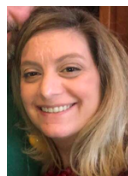
"The facts of the case did not involve children or any sexual act," Davenport wrote in an email to The Daily Progress. "In Circuit Court, Ms. Hoppe performed twenty-five hours of community service in lieu of paying a fine before the Commonwealth moved to dismiss the charge."

At the time of that arrest, Hoppe was recently separated from then husband Joel Hoppe, a magistrate judge with the U.S. Court for the Western District of Virginia which hears cases in Charlottesville.

The following year, citing two cases of adultery, he filed for divorce. A letter filed in Albemarle Circuit Court from a counselor and parenting coach notes that the couple's two daughters were experiencing "anxiety about Mom's precarious mental and physical health status."



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LOCAL NEWS

Charlottesville mother arrested on child porn, attempted exploitation charges

Hawes Spencer

Much of the divorce case file was sealed at the request of Eleanor Hoppe's attorney, Laura Blair Butler.

In a motion for a protective order, Butler wrote that some documents "are of an extremely personal nature and publication of such information would be embarrassing not only to defendant but also to plaintiff and the parties' minor children."

Subsequently, Butler hired Eleanor Hoppe as a paralegal at the law firm of Tucker Griffin Barnes.

That troubles Jill Kavanagh.

“It’s just creepy,” Kavanagh told The Daily Progress. “Was she even vetted at all?”

Kavanagh said that when news broke about Hoppe’s arrest she realized she had seen the name before. Hoppe, Kavanagh said, had been copied, until early February, on practically every email from Butler, who was the opposing counsel in Kavanagh’s then-pending divorce.

“The fact that she is on my divorce stuff just disgusts me,” said Kavanagh. “It doesn’t sit well with me, because this woman has my children’s information.”



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Kavanagh provided the headers of redacted emails spanning Sept. 6 through Feb. 3. But an effort to discuss Hoppe’s hiring with Butler was not successful.

“I have no comment,” Butler told The Daily Progress via email, adding that she would not be providing any comment in the future on the case.

Tucker Griffin Barnes is far from the only local concern to have employed Hoppe. A graduate of St. Catherine’s, a private school in Richmond, with a degree from the University of Virginia and extensive experience in event planning, Hoppe has worked for numerous entities including a short stint at Uva.

At the time of her arrest Hoppe told the D.C.-based federal court that she was “set to begin” a new job at a local university. However, UVa spokesman Brian Coy told The Daily Progress that the only work Hoppe did occurred in February of 2020 as a temporary event planner.

“Her employment lasted 30 days,” Coy wrote in an email.

Other jobs include serving as an early learning specialist at ReadyKids, a education and support program for underprivileged children. Another job was serving as an event planner for Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Central Blue Ridge, but that nonprofit group said Hoppe worked only in special events, not with children. About two decades ago, Hoppe was working as a victim’s advocate in the office of the Richmond Commonwealth’s Attorney.



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“What we would suspect here is some history of sexual abuse in her own history,” said Fracher, the forensic psychologist. “That stuff goes on across all socioeconomic categories.”

The next hearing in Hoppe’s case is a status conference set for June 6.

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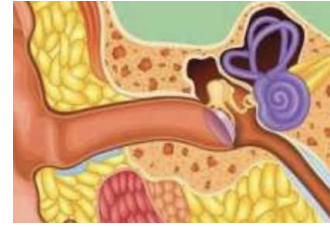
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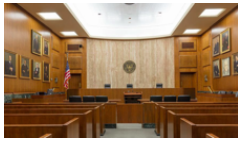
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