

# Teacher pleads guilty to child porn charges

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A Parma music school owner who hid a camera in the school’s restroom pleaded guilty to federal child pornography charges, officials announced Friday.

Philip M. Close, 43, pleaded guilty to a 74-count indictment, including 61 counts of production of child pornography. He faces a maximum of 2,090 years in prison and an \$18 million fine, prosecutors said. “The defendant occupied a position of trust with respect to his students,” U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy Jr. said in a statement. “His perverse violation of that trust, together with our duty to protect our children, warrant the defendant being held fully accountable for all that he did, and full accountability is precisely what today’s plea ensures.”

Between 2016 and 2019, Close owned the Close School of Music on West Ridge Road, where he provided private music lessons to children. He put “spy cameras throughout the school and secretly recorded the students, parents, and other teachers,” Assistant U.S. Attorney Meghan McGuire said. Two cameras were in the school’s only bathroom — one under a toilet and the other in a water cooler facing the toilet. McGuire said the cameras were strategically placed in these positions.

Some footage revealed Close inappropriately touched his students and himself during lessons.

Before opening his own school, Close worked at another school between 2012 and 2016, where he also placed hidden cameras in a bathroom.

“Between 2012 and 2019, Close produced hundreds of videos of child pornography involving 61 identified minor victims,” prosecutors said in a release. “The youngest victim was four years old.”

A search warrant executed at the Close School of Music yielded 13 devices containing images and videos of child pornography.

On Dec. 5, 2019, a mother with two children at the school reported the discovery of a video camera attached to a toilet in the school’s restroom, the criminal complaint said. She was at the school waiting for her child to finish a music lesson, when she allegedly found the camera.

“The mother observed a small black camera lens facing towards the toilet seat, and a small metallic-looking piece hanging from a wire off of the toilet,” McGuire said. “The mother grabbed and pulled the wires and found a camera-device and wires taped to the bottom of the toilet with black electrical tape.”

She removed the camera and then called 911.

A Monroe County sheriff’s deputy spoke with Close and he admitted the camera was his, authorities said.

Close is scheduled to be sentenced Aug. 16 by U.S. District Judge Charles A. Siragusa.

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