



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
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Champaign Man Arrested, Charged with Kidnapping Visiting Scholar

URBANA, Ill. – Late today, FBI agents arrested a Champaign, Ill., man, Brendt Christensen, 27, on a criminal complaint that charges Christensen with kidnapping visiting Chinese scholar Yingying Zhang on June 9, 2017. Christensen will remain in law enforcement custody pending his initial federal court appearance in Urbana scheduled on Monday, July 3, at 10:00 a.m.

The arrest and charges were announced by FBI Special Agent in Charge Sean Cox, Springfield Division, and Acting U.S. Attorney Patrick D. Hansen.

The affidavit filed in support of the complaint alleges that on June 9, Christensen was driving the black Saturn Astra which was observed on security camera video as it stopped next to Zhang at the corner of W. Clark St. and N. Goodwin Ave., at approximately 2:00 p.m. Zhang is observed on video entering the front passenger side of the vehicle. The vehicle then pulled away and proceeded northbound on N. Goodwin Ave.

Since Zhang was last seen in the video entering the car, the FBI, the University of Illinois Police Department and the Illinois State Police and local law enforcement have worked around the clock to locate Ms. Zhang and to investigate her disappearance. As part of this effort, the University of Illinois community of faculty, staff and students, and residents of the Champaign-Urbana community have provided information and support to law enforcement in the continuing search for Ms. Zhang.

According to the affidavit, on June 29, 2017, while Christensen was under law enforcement surveillance, agents overheard him explaining that he kidnapped Zhang. Based on this, and other facts uncovered during the investigation of this matter, law enforcement agents believe that Ms. Zhang is no longer alive.

Members of Ms. Zhang's family, the Chinese consulate, and University of Illinois officials have been advised of Christensen's arrest and the evidence in the possession of the FBI.

Members of the public are reminded that a complaint is merely an accusation; the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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