

# AFTER HIS MOTHER ASKED FOR HELP, FBI TERRORISM STING TARGETS MENTALLY ILL TEEN

She said two FBI informants “groomed” her son. They waited until the day after his 18th birthday to spring their trap.

Murtaza Hussain

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation headquarters in Washington, D.C., on July 3, 2023. Photo: Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

**ON A RECENT** Monday, the Department of Justice announced the arrest of an 18-year-old man, Davin Daniel Meyer, on charges of

attempting to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. Meyer had been arrested the previous Friday, July 14, at Denver International Airport as he tried to board a flight to Turkey. Meyer thought he was going to the Turkish city of Ankara for a rendezvous with members of the Islamic State terrorist group.

In a press release announcing the arrest, the Justice Department said that Meyer had been caught after he had “pledged an oath of allegiance to the leader of ISIS and intended to travel to serve as a fighter for ISIS in Iraq.”

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Beneath the surface of these serious allegations, however, are troubling details about what really happened between Meyer and the FBI in the months leading up to his arrest. According to the criminal complaint against him, Meyer had first come to the attention of the FBI last year when he was 17 years old, after a person he knew contacted the local sheriff's office to report “concerning behavior,” including threats of violence against them and the United States by Meyer. The complaint did not mention that the person who reported Meyer to the authorities was his mother.

Concerned over Meyer's erratic behavior and deteriorating mental health, Deanna Meyer reported her son, then a minor, to the authorities in the hopes that they would help keep him away from trouble. What followed instead was a lengthy government investigation employing two confidential FBI informants. First

contacting Meyer the day after his 18th birthday, the informants secretly developed a relationship with him. Rather than help steer him away from wrongdoing, the FBI informants helped Meyer develop the plan to join the Islamic State that eventually led to his arrest.

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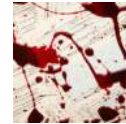
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In a hearing last week to determine whether Meyer would be held in custody while awaiting trial, his mother testified that she had tried to get help from the police to aid her son, who had suffered from mental illness for years and made threats of violence against her since he was 14 years old.

Meyer had previously spent eight months, between 2021 and 2022, in a facility “focused on mental health and behavior treatment,” according to the affidavit. He had been diagnosed with autism, clinical depression, and a range of anxiety and mood disorders — diagnoses of which the government was aware and even referenced in the criminal complaint. All while still a minor, Meyer espoused white supremacist beliefs and, still grappling with a range of diagnosed mental illnesses, then developed an interest in extremist Islam online. The behavior had alarmed his mother.

**“It was the wrong place to go for help in**

“I had exhausted all private routes,” Deanna Meyer said at the hearing, explaining her original decision to

## **going to law enforcement.”**

contact the local sheriff’s office for help with her child. “I was more concerned about ideology

and where that would go.”

If convicted on the charges, Meyer could face up to 20 years in prison. Yet his family and lawyers say that he had been the victim of an FBI sting operation that groomed him for the very crime for which he was arrested.

“It was the wrong place to go for help in going to law enforcement,” Meyer’s lawyer David Kaplan said at the hearing. “They represented themselves as facilitators and fanned the flames of what they condemn now.”





Davin Daniel Meyer at 16 years old. Photo: Courtesy of Deanna Meyer

## **Mental Health Diagnoses**

The two paid undercover FBI informants who helped secure his arrest began communicating with Meyer “soon after his 18th birthday,”

according to the affidavit in the case – fostering his path to extremist ideology only once he could be legally prosecuted as an adult. One of the informants even traveled to meet with Meyer in person, three times, in his small Colorado hometown. They discussed the idea of going abroad to join a terrorist group – a possibility that Meyer had already been talking over with the other FBI operative online.

The complaint goes into considerable detail about the relationship that developed between Meyer and the undercover informants, whom he believed to be members of the Islamic State who could facilitate his travel abroad.

Court documents also show that the FBI was aware of Meyer’s history of mental illness, including his stay at a residential treatment facility during part of the year in which the investigation started.



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While institutionalized, Meyer reportedly refused to take his prescribed psychiatric medication or attend online school programs. He also engaged in racist speech against medical staff before developing an interest in radical Islamist ideology. The FBI reviewed this history, saying in the affidavit that “records show that Meyer has received diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder; attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder; adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood; specific learning disorder with impairment in mathematics; and major depressive disorder, recurrent episode, moderate.”

Sometime after his release from mental health treatment, in the summer of 2022, Meyer was banned from a local mosque he tried to attend after being accused of harassing the imam and congregants.

That November, he found the Islamic State online – in the form of the FBI informant. After developing a relationship with them, Meyer sent the informant videos of himself, face wrapped in scarves, pledging allegiance to the group. The informant later introduced Meyer to the second informant in December 2022, whom he met in person and discussed travel abroad. In their meetings, Meyer shared videos with the informant he had found online of violent acts perpetrated by ISIS abroad.

For a period of several months, Meyer continued discussing with the FBI informants a plan for him to leave the country and join a terrorist group abroad. Many of these discussions included talk about what type of shoes, clothing, and electronic devices would be useful for him while traveling, as well as how he would obtain a passport and accumulate enough money to pay for his ticket. Meyer attempted to work part-time jobs to save the required funds. After running into problems securing the cash, he eventually settled upon using a sum of \$3,000 provided by his mother that she had given him to pay for groceries and transportation.

The issue of his mother and how she would respond to him potentially leaving the country was a running theme for Meyer in his conversations with the FBI. “One day she’s gonna wake up and her son’s not gonna be there and that’s gonna be difficult for her,” Meyer said, as quoted in the

**“I am very happy this is happening, but at the time I feel sad because I will most likely never see my parents again.”**

indictment. In the end, he decided upon leaving a note in his apartment, to which she had a spare key, indicating that he had left the country and would not be coming back.



In the days leading up to his final departure, Meyer, while expressing to the FBI informant his continued commitment to the plan for him to leave, continued to bring up his parents. “I am very happy this is happening, but at the time I feel sad because I will most likely never see my parents again, and I’m leaving the place I’ve grown up all my life and become attached to,” he told an FBI informant in a message. “It is a trial but it can be heavy on the heart.”

According to the indictment, Meyer continued to express “anxiety and hesitation,” right up until the hours he was expected to board a flight to Turkey in July, though he reassured the informants that he would still go through with the plan. To his own detriment, he would wind up fulfilling his promise to the FBI – a plan that they themselves had helped him develop. At around 8:00 p.m. on July 14, after showing his boarding pass to a gate agent at Denver International Airport, Meyer was arrested by FBI agents while walking the jet bridge to board his flight.

## “Groomed”

Meyer’s case follows a long pattern of FBI sting operations targeting young people with histories of mental illness that make them vulnerable to manipulation – stings that often result in the teens being prosecuted for terrorism and receiving lengthy prison terms. Just last month, a [lengthy FBI investigation](#) targeting a 16-year-old with “brain development issues” led to an arrest on terrorism charges shortly after he – like Meyer – became a legal adult.



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At Meyer's hearing last week, it was alleged by prosecutors that Meyer had also communicated online with an Islamic extremist in the United Kingdom who had [recently been arrested](#) – likely a reference to a notoriously media-friendly radical activist named Anjem Choudary. The nature of that alleged contact and how extensive it was remains unclear. In the charges against Meyer related to his alleged criminal plot, the only terrorists he is accused of ever actually collaborating with were undercover operatives working for the FBI.

More details could come out as Meyer's case heads to trial that could shed light on the allegations against him. At his hearing, prosecutors stated that the 18-year-old was given many “off-ramps” during the investigation by the FBI informants, but that he remained committed to carrying out his imagined plan to leave the country with their help and join ISIS.

His mother, however, believes that Meyer – far from being a legitimate threat to herself or to U.S. national security – was “groomed” at a young age while already grappling with mental illness to generate yet another terrorism case for federal prosecutors and the FBI.

In a Facebook post, titled “My Lost Son,” Deanna Meyer lamented what she described as the manipulation of her son by law enforcement officials and the FBI.

“I made the choice to call the police and beg for any kind of mental health options before his 18th birthday to keep him safe and out of the criminal justice system not knowing that their solution would be to wait until the day he was 18 and send multiple undercover agents to groom him,” she wrote. “I lost him. He is gone behind the walls of steel and indifference.”

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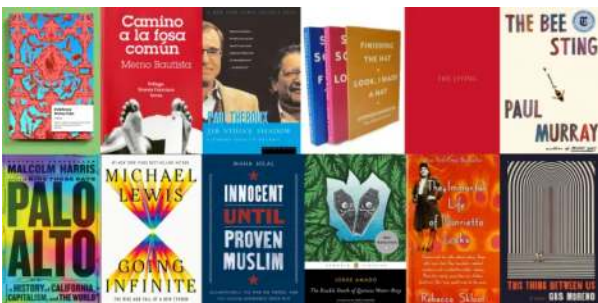


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