



# Department of Justice

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Central District of Illinois**

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## **Grand Jury Indicts Champaign Man on Charge of Kidnapping**

URBANA, Ill. – A federal grand jury today returned an indictment that charges Brendt A. Christensen, 28, of Champaign, Ill., with kidnapping visiting Chinese scholar Yingying Zhang on June 9, 2017. Christensen was previously arrested and charged by criminal complaint on June 30. On July 5, U.S. Magistrate Judge Eric I. Long ordered that Christensen remain detained in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service pending trial.

The date for arraignment for Christensen will be scheduled by the U.S. Clerk of the Court in Urbana. A preliminary hearing that had been scheduled on July 14, has been cancelled.

Acting U.S. Attorney Patrick D. Hansen and FBI Special Agent in Charge Sean Cox, Springfield Division, announced the indictment return.

The indictment alleges that Christensen kidnapped and held Yingying Zhang, identified as Y.Z. in the indictment, on June 9, and that he used a cellular telephone and Saturn Astra motor vehicle, both instruments of interstate commerce, to commit and in furtherance of the commission of the offense.

If convicted, the penalty for kidnapping is up to life in prison.

According to an affidavit previously filed with the court, security camera footage taken on June 9, shows Zhang entering the front passenger side of a black Saturn Astra allegedly driven by Christensen at approximately 2:00 p.m. The vehicle had stopped next to Zhang at the corner of W. Clark St. and N. Goodwin Ave., in Champaign. The vehicle then pulled away and proceeded northbound on N. Goodwin Ave.

At approximately 1:39 p.m., on June 9, according to the complaint affidavit, Zhang sent a text message from her cell phone to a manager of an apartment complex in Urbana. In the message Zhang said that she was running behind to meet the manager to sign a lease, and she thought she would arrive at approximately 2:10 p.m., for her appointment. At approximately 2:38 p.m., the apartment manager sent a text message to Zhang and received no response. Later on June 9, at approximately 9:24 p.m., a University of Illinois associate professor reported to University police that multiple colleagues had tried to reach Zhang by phone and she had not responded.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation; University of Illinois Police Department; and the Illinois State Police are continuing the investigation.

As stated in the complaint affidavit, law enforcement investigating Zhang's disappearance believe Zhang is deceased. This determination is based on facts presented in court and court documents, and other facts uncovered during the ongoing investigation.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Bryan D. Freres and Eugene L. Miller are representing the government on behalf of the U.S. Attorney's Office, Urbana Division.

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