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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESCOTT MAN CONVICTED OF KIDNAPPING HOAX

Yavapai County Attorney Dennis McGrane announced that on May 7, 2026, a Yavapai County jury convicted 33 year-old Mark Michael Ellis of Prescott, Arizona, of Attempted Fraud Schemes, Attempted Theft, and Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, following a jury trial in Prescott, Arizona. County Attorney Dennis McGrane thanked Deputy Yavapai County Attorney Karolina Czaplinska for an excellent job of presenting the case to the jury, and thanked the jurors for their careful attention to the case. County Attorney McGrane also commended the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office ("YCSO") for their thorough investigation.

Yavapai County Attorney Dennis McGrane stated, "My Office will always vigorously prosecute people who try to defraud others or take criminal advantage of someone else's kindness. If Mr. Ellis had taken personal responsibility for his drug and gambling problem and sought treatment, he would not be facing prison. I encourage anyone with a drug or gambling addiction to seek treatment before it ruins your life and the lives of your family."

The YCSO investigation began on January 8, 2025, when Ellis sent his employer numerous texts claiming he had been kidnapped by a Mexican drug cartel. Ellis told his employer he needed over \$17,000 wired to his account or he would be killed. Ellis also Facetimed the employer from a "basement" where he claimed he was being held prisoner, and again requested the money so he would not be killed by the cartel.

The employer called YCSO, which quickly opened an investigation. After YCSO began investigating, Ellis admitted to the employer that he had lost over \$15,000 gambling and devised this scheme to get money. Detectives found Ellis at home with his girlfriend, who was unaware that her boyfriend had supposedly been kidnapped. Ellis admitted to devising the fake kidnapping scheme due to his online gambling losses. Detectives learned the "basement" where Ellis claimed he had been held prisoner was actually his garage. During the investigation at Ellis' home, detectives found heroin-related drug paraphernalia and Ellis admitted using methamphetamine while he was texting his employer.

Ellis fled midway through the trial, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. A sentencing date will be set once he is apprehended. Anyone with knowledge of Ellis' whereabouts is encouraged to contact the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office at (928) 771-3260.

Photo Attached: Mark Michael Ellis

