

Epstein Denied Bail in Sex Trafficking Case

American financier Jeffrey Epstein will remain behind bars while he awaits trial on charges of sex trafficking dozens of underage girls, a U.S. judge ruled on Thursday.

U.S. District Judge Richard Berman announced his decision at a hearing in federal court in Manhattan, rejecting Epstein's request to stay under house arrest in his New York mansion valued at \$77 million. Epstein has pleaded not guilty.

Prosecutors had argued that Epstein should remain jailed both because he posed a danger to the community and because there was a high risk he would use his vast wealth to flee the country.

"The government has established a danger to others and the community by clear and convincing evidence," Berman said at the hearing. The judge said he would issue a written opinion explaining his decision more fully later on Thursday.

The judge also scheduled a hearing in the case for July 31.

Epstein's social circle over the years has included Donald Trump before he became U.S. president, former President Bill Clinton and Britain's Prince Andrew.

Epstein is accused of arranging for girls under the age of 18 to perform nude "massages" and other sex acts, and of paying some girls to recruit others, from at least 2002 to 2005. Prosecutors have said that a search of Epstein's Upper East Side home, which has been valued at about \$77 million, turned up hundreds or thousands of pictures of nude women, some of them minors, along with cash, diamonds and valuable art.

Epstein is being held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center,

a fortress-like jail that has been criticized by inmates and lawyers for harsh conditions.

In a one-page summary of his finances filed in court, Epstein said he had a net worth of \$559 million, with assets including his jet, four homes and two private islands.

Epstein had offered to pay for private armed guards to watch him under house arrest, and sign a bail bond of \$100 million or more secured by his assets. However, Berman said Thursday that the bail package was inadequate, and that no other possible package was likely to do better.

Lawyers for Epstein have said their client has had an unblemished record since he pleaded guilty more than a decade ago to a state prostitution charge in Florida and agreed to register as a sex offender.

Critics have called that plea deal, which let Epstein avoid federal prosecution, too lenient.

Alex Acosta, who as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida oversaw Epstein's earlier deal, resigned last week as Trump's secretary of labor, saying he did not want to be a distraction for the White House. {eoa}

© 2019 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.