

Haitian priest denies molesting teen-ager

Associated Press

TRENTON — A visiting priest in the Trenton Diocese accused of molesting a teen-age parishioner and then trying to flee the country pleaded innocent Tuesday to sex charges.

The Rev. Jean-Level Eliscard, 28, entered the plea at his arraignment before Superior Court Judge Thomas DeMartin, who set bail for the Haitian native at \$75,000, the prosecutor said.

DeMartin, the presiding criminal judge for Mercer County, also imposed several conditions on Eliscard, including that he have no contact with the victim or the victim's family, Assistant Prosecutor Loni Hand said.

Hand, who directs Mercer County's child abuse and sexual assault unit, said the judge also required that the prosecutor's office be notified before Eliscard can be released on bail.

Eliscard is charged with attempted aggravated sexual assault of a 13-year-old girl, along with the less-serious charges of aggravated criminal sexual contact, child abuse and endanger-

ing the welfare of a child.

Eliscard, who was represented by attorney Jerome Ballarotto at the 10-minute hearing, was returned to the Mercer County Detention Center after the arraignment, Hand said.

She said authorities have confiscated Eliscard's passport.

The priest was arrested Saturday at John F. Kennedy International Airport 50 minutes before he was to board a plane to Haiti. Authorities, who had begun investigating Friday when the girl's father first disclosed the alleged attack, were tipped by a parishioner that Eliscard had gone to the airport.

The charges stem from allegations dating to Sept. 27 in Hamilton Township, near Trenton. Police say Eliscard visited the girl while she was home alone and was molesting her when her father came home and interrupted him.

Detective Shannon Hoffman said police were told that Eliscard "was attempting penetration at one point" during the encounter.



By Tom Kelly, Associated Press

Arraignment: The Rev. Jean-Level Eliscard returns to Mercer County Jail Tuesday after pleading innocent to the sex charges.