



Department of Justice

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**REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL MARK R. FILIP
AT THE PROJECT SAFE CHILDHOOD PRESS CONFERENCE**

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Good morning. I'm here today to announce good news concerning the Department of Justice's efforts to fight the sexual exploitation of children on the Internet. In that regard, the Department would like to thank President Bush and Congress for their support and leadership, which has allowed the Department to dedicate \$5 million in new funds to support Project Safe Childhood, the Department of Justice initiative that targets sexual exploitation crimes against children. This money will fund 43 new Assistant United States Attorneys across the country, including one here in the Western District of North Carolina.

These positions were awarded on a competitive basis, based on, for example, this district's history of success in bringing child exploitation cases, and the leadership of U.S. Attorney Gretchen Shappert. This is a new infusion of prosecutors, to combat the abuse and exploitation of children through the Internet – both in cases of online enticement and child pornography.

Explicit images of children on the Internet are not only increasing in number, they are becoming more depraved. To be clear: we're not talking about innocent family snapshots, we're talking about the most horrific crimes imaginable, like videos depicting the graphic sexual assault of children, and even infants, traded around the world like baseball cards.

These are tough cases. They take an emotional toll on investigators and jurors. But we know we cannot stop, because however difficult these cases are for people in law enforcement, it is nothing compared to the suffering of child victims and their families. We know that a great number of the perpetrators who collect these images are also hands-on offenders, and so we fight for the dignity and the rights of the children they target, and to promote the safety of all children in our communities.

It was for the sake of these children that, two years ago, the Department of Justice set out to marshal the efforts of federal, state, and local authorities, as well as non-profit organizations like the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The Department charged each U.S. Attorney's office with making the most effective use of their resources, and the Western District of North Carolina has done just that.

The Department of Justice is encouraged by the success of this program nationwide, as we've increased the number of arrests, investigations, and prosecutions. Just as important is the large number of children we've been able to identify from these images, putting names to faces, and rescuing kids.

The Western District of North Carolina has been an important part of this effort. One example is the prosecution of a married couple named Troy and Billie Witschi. Troy sexually abused his young daughter, and took pictures of the abuse. His wife, Billie, knew what he was doing, even taking some of the pictures herself.

The Sheriff's Offices in Mitchell and McDowell Counties, the State Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Attorney's Office, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service worked together to bring justice in this case. In the end, Troy and Billie Witschi pleaded guilty in federal court in Asheville, and were sentenced last year to the maximum: 30 years and 20 years in prison, respectively.

We're proud of our work in this area, but there is much more to do. As long as there are predators out there acting on their perverse fantasies, creating and trading in these videos and photos, we will not relent. These cases will continue to be a priority for the Department of Justice -- we want these people to know that we are going after them and that they will pay a high price for their crimes.

Again, we at the Department are grateful to Congress and to the President for their support— adding to our resources to fight these despicable crimes. With these new resources we will be able to bring more prosecutions, and afford justice to more victims, both the children and their families. We will be able to catch the watcher before he turns into an active predator, and the predator before he strikes again. Our message is clear: the Internet will be a safe place for children, not a safe haven for perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Thank you very much. I'll be happy to take your questions now.

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