



For Immediate Release

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**STOP CHILD PREDATORS MOURNS
SENSELESS DEATH OF JESSICA LUNSFORD**

WASHINGTON, D.C., March 8, 2007 --- While yesterday's guilty verdict in the trial of John Evander Couey, who abducted, raped and murdered nine-year-old Jessica Lunsford in 2005 will deliver justice for the little girl and her family, the fact that Couey was free to commit his crimes in the first place spotlights the need for all states to impose tougher mandatory minimum penalties for those who commit sexual crimes against children.

Couey, a registered sex offender, abducted Jessica from her Homosassa Springs, Fla. home on the night of February 23, 2005 and repeatedly sexually assaulted her before stuffing her in garbage bags and burying her alive in a shallow grave behind his home.

Couey's prior criminal record includes arrests for burglary, carrying a concealed weapon and indecent exposure. In 1991, he was arrested in Kissimmee, Fla. on a charge of fondling a child under age 16. He was convicted of a reduced charge of attempted lewd acts on a child and was sentenced to five years in prison and one year's probation.

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During a burglary in 1978, he was accused of grabbing a girl in her bedroom, placing his hand over her mouth and kissing her. He was sentenced to 10 years but was paroled in 1980.

Jessica is the namesake of “Jessica’s Law,” which mandates minimum sentences of 25 years’ imprisonment and lifetime electronic monitoring of adults convicted of lewd or lascivious acts against child victims.

“Mr. Couey has a 30-year history of child predation, and his ability to slip through cracks in the system ultimately cost Jessica Lunsford her life,” said Stacie Rumenap, Executive Director of Stop Child Predators (SCP). “We hope that the details of this case, and the thousands of similar cases, will persuade state legislatures across the country to pass Jessica’s Law and help prevent other families from having to go through this sort of tragedy.”

Couey is one of an estimated 560,000 registered sex offenders in the United States.

Stop Child Predators is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. The organization is dedicated to the establishment of penalty enhancements for those found guilty of committing sexual offenses against children; the implementation of an effective and efficient nationwide sex offender registry; and the protection of the rights of crime victims. For more information, contact SCP at (202) 234-0090 or online at www.stopchildpredators.org.

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