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Stop Child Predators Applauds New York Legislator for Introducing Jessica's Law

(New York, NY) – Today, Washington, DC-based Stop Child Predators was joined by New York State Assemblyman Felix Ortiz and representatives from OmniLink Systems in supporting the passage of Jessica's Law in New York. Stacie Rumenap, Executive Director of Stop Child Predators, offered the following statement:

The sexual victimization of children is overwhelming in magnitude yet largely unrecognized and underreported. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that one in five girls and one in ten boys are sexually exploited before they reach adulthood. Worse, the average child sexual predator exploits anywhere from seven to over 200 victims in his or her lifetime.

Many of these sex offenders are released into society soon after they are convicted. According to the most recent available data from the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the average sentence imposed on child molesters is seven years and the average offender is released after serving only three of those seven years. This is despite their potential to become repeat offenders. The same BJS study shows that sex offenders are four times more likely than other criminals to be arrested again for a sex crime. Yet we are repeatedly faced with news reports where child offenders have been set free, only to harm innocent children again – children who are vulnerable to victimization as their trusting natures make them perfect targets for perpetrators. It is for reasons such as these that our organization advocates for the passage of Jessica's Law in all 50 states, including 25-year to life mandatory minimum sentences for convicted child sex offenders and the monitoring of offenders once they are released back into our communities.

The U.S. Congress recognized this problem and acted last year, and President Bush signed into law *The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act*. Named after Adam Walsh who was abducted from a Hollywood, Florida shopping mall just over 25 years ago, this sweeping new law, in part, mandates 25-year minimum sentences for sex offenders.

While progress has been accomplished, there is still much more to be done.



The guilty verdict in the trial of John Couey, who abducted, raped, and murdered nine-year-old Jessica Lunsford in 2005 will deliver some justice for Jessica and her family but 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, Florida 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 included 24 arrests for burglary, carrying a concealed weapon, and indecent exposure. During a burglary in 1978, he grabbed a young girl in her bedroom and kissed her. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison but was paroled in 1980 after serving only two of the 10-year sentence. In 1991, he was arrested on a charge of fondling a child under the age of 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 of probation. At the time of Jessica's murder, Couey was a registered sex offender in Georgia but had not registered in Florida where it was well known that he sometimes lived with his sister. Worse, just three months before Jessica's murder, Couey was being monitored by a GPS system. But the GPS was removed, and Couey was free to commit yet another crime.

In Idaho, just last year, Joseph Duncan, another registered sex offender who was twice-convicted and twice-released of sexual assault against a minor, kidnapped and molested eight-year-old Sasha Groene, after molesting and murdering her brother Dylan and killing the rest of the family. Duncan is yet another example of a sex offender who was not behind bars, not being monitored by GPS, and therefore able to commit another crime.

In California, you may recall that in 1993, 12-year-old Polly Klaas was abducted from her bedroom where she had been hosting a sleepover with her girlfriends. Her abductor, Richard Allen Davis, had been released from prison after serving half of a 16-year sentence for robbing and pistol whipping an earlier victim, in what was his second kidnapping conviction. Within three months of being released, he abducted, raped and murdered Polly. He even bragged to his cell mates that when he was released from jail he would avoid contracting AIDS by "getting a young one."

Sadly, these are just three of the thousands of examples in which repeat sex offenders have re-offended. Had there been more stringent sentencing penalties and strictly monitored registration requirements, Couey, Duncan, and Davis might have been prevented.

We cannot wait for the next piece of legislation named after yet another murdered or molested child. We applaud Assemblyman Ortiz for taking the initiative on this issue by



introducing legislation that provides communities more protection against sex offenders, and we encourage the rest of the legislature to follow his lead.

Stop Child Predators is a non-profit organization that brings together a team of policy experts, law enforcement officers, and community leaders to launch state-by-state campaigns to educate lawmakers and the public about the need of establishing penalty enhancements for convicted sex offenders, implementing an effective nationwide sex offender registry, and protecting the rights of crime victims. The organization is an active proponent for the passage of Jessica's Law in all 50 states and at the national level. In the past two years, 29 states have enacted provisions of Jessica's Law. For further information, visit www.stopchildpredators.org.