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ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES

Message from the Executive Director

As summer approaches and the legislative year comes to an end in most states, Stop Child Predators has the chance to reflect on its work in the state legislature as we look forward to next year. The key to our success in passing Jessica's Law this past year has been the leadership demonstrated not only by our elected officials, but also by our state volunteers. These are men and women who have spent countless hours generating phone calls to legislative offices encouraging their lawmakers to pass Jessica's Law; they have written letters to the editors of their local papers detailing the importance of child safety; and they have organized press conferences and held other local events keeping child protection at the forefront of the public agenda.

Improving Maryland Communities through Effective Action and Leadership:

Thanks to the introduction of legislation by Senator Nancy Jacobs (R-Bel Air) and Delegates Anthony O'Donnell (R-Solomons) and Chris Shank (R-Washington County), and their extraordinary leadership on the issue, Stop Child Predators had the opportunity to travel to Annapolis to testify before the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate Judiciary Committees in support of Jessica's Law, both last year and again this past March. Senator Jacobs' leadership on this issue allowed Jessica's Law to pass the Senate Judiciary Committee and the full Senate with little opposition.

Jessica's Law faced an uncertain future in the House of Delegates, however, as House Judiciary Chairman Joseph Vallario (D-Suitland) seemed determined to prevent its passage. During last year's legislative session, it initially appeared that Mr. Vallario had been successful in killing Jessica's Law. But after Bill O'Reilly of Fox News Channel attacked Mr. Vallario for blocking the bill, members of the General Assembly were inundated with telephone calls, e-mails, and faxes demanding action. At a special session of the General Assembly last June, lawmakers agreed to a compromise that mandated a 25-year sentence for these crimes. But at Mr. Vallario's insistence, sex offenders remained eligible for parole after serving just half of their sentences.

But thanks to the dedication of two volunteers, Jerry Norton and Joan Harris, president and vice president respectively of the grassroots organization Citizens for Jessica's Law in Maryland, Maryland's political universe was turned upside down.



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Mr. Norton and Ms. Harris helped unite Stop Child Predators and other national organizations such as Justice for Children, KlaasKids Foundation, and PROTECT, as well as hundreds of local activists including Calvert County Commissioner Linda Kelley, Mrs. Maryland Ginny Meerman, Mid-Shore League of Republican Women President Fran Bergere, Harford County Detective Rick Lyne, and other victims and supporters who ascended upon Annapolis to share their stories with the media and lawmakers alike. They worked to focus national and local media attention on the story. Once again Mr. O'Reilly turned his attention to Mr. Vallario and criticized him for blocking Jessica's Law, generating yet another flood of angry telephone calls, e-mails, etc. Just as the House and Senate Judiciary Committees were about to hold hearings on bringing Jessica's Law to a floor vote, Mr. Norton and Ms. Harris organized a press conference where at least one hundred volunteers rallied to support the passage of Jessica's Law. Ms. Harris spent weekends scheduling visits with lawmakers and assembling purple ribbons for volunteers to wear to show their support as they walked the halls of Annapolis. And as Mr. Norton would strategize about the best course of action, Ms. Harris would make those plans a reality.

By the end of March, Mr. Norton and Ms. Harris' efforts had paid off. Chairman Vallario endorsed Jessica's Law and his committee unanimously approved it. Within days of the passage of the bill by the Judiciary Committee, the legislation overwhelmingly passed both chambers, with the House voting unanimously in favor and the Senate voting 43-3 to send the bill to the governor's desk. On May 17th, Governor Martin O'Malley signed Jessica's Law into Maryland state law.

Stop Child Predators will be forever in debt to Mr. Norton, Ms. Harris, Senator Jacobs, and Delegates O'Donnell and Shank for their tireless efforts over the past two years to get Jessica's Law enacted in Maryland.

To hear about additional state successes and other insights into Stop Child Predators, please continue to read on. If you have any questions or comments you would like to share, you can reach me at rumenap@stopchildpredators.org.

Stacie Rumenap



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Stop Child Predators Partners with the Jessica Marie Lunsford Foundation, Mark Lunsford Joins SCP's Advisory Board

Stop Child Predators and the Jessica Marie Lunsford Foundation have joined together in their commitment to protecting America's children from sexual predators. Led by Mark Lunsford, the father of nine-year-old Jessica Lunsford who was abducted, raped, and murdered in 2005 by John Couey, a twice convicted and twice released sex offender, the Jessica Marie Lunsford Foundation is dedicated to protecting children from sexual exploitation. The organization helps educate federal, state, and local lawmakers on the importance of enacting Jessica's Law, and provides grassroots awareness of the issue within local communities.

In addition to partnering with Mr. Lunsford's Foundation, Mark Lunsford joined the advisory board of Stop Child Predators. "By combining the efforts of Mark Lunsford, the Jessica Marie Lunsford Foundation, and Stop Child Predators, we are confident we can effectively secure increased penalties for those who commit sexual offenses against children, including mandatory sentencing minimums and electronic monitoring," said Stacie Rumenap, Executive Director of Stop Child Predators. "We are certain that by working together we will play a vital roll in helping to save another child from becoming a victim of sexual assault."

The key tenants of Jessica's Law are mandatory sentencing and electronic monitoring. Additionally, Jessica's Law strengthens the reporting requirements for adjudicated sexual offenders. To date, Jessica's Law has been enacted in 31 states, with a handful of additional states having something similar to Jessica's Law. For more information about the Jessica Marie Lunsford Foundation, please visit their website at www.jmlfoundation.org.

Stop Child Predators Announces Partnership with Leader in Sex Offender Monitoring Technology

Stop Child Predators and Omnilink Systems, a pioneer in vital status systems, have joined together in their commitment to protecting America's children from sexual predators.

Omnalink's monitoring technology solution, Focalpoint 2.0, uses a combination of GPS, cellular technology, RFID, and situation-specific sensors to provide sophisticated location awareness information in real-time, even when offenders are inside buildings, buses, trains or tunnels. It also provides an alert system where potential victims are notified before a predator comes into contact with them and allows law enforcement to provide real-time alerts to their closest responders.

"This partnership reassures that Omnilink is on the right path to accomplishing our goal of providing the most advanced and reliable monitoring technology available in the market," said Steve Aninye, CEO of Omnilink System. "Together with Stop Child Predators, we hope to increase awareness of this critical issue and work to get the support of state and national officials to join this fight to protect our youth."



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Stop Child Predators works with decision makers across the country to create stronger and more effective policies against sexual predators. A vital part of the recommended legislation is mandating the use of GPS monitoring devices on all convicted sex offenders upon release of prison facilities for the remainder of their life.

“It’s our duty as Americans to protect our children from sexual predators. At Stop Child Predators, we feel that Omnilink’s technology solution is the most accurate and efficient tracking device on the market,” said Stacie Rumenap, Executive Director of Stop Child Predators. “We are confident through its offender monitoring technology and device that Omnilink will play a vital roll in helping to save another child from becoming a victim.”

To learn more about Omnilink Systems, please visit their website at www.omnilinksystems.com.

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES & NATIONAL NEWS

National Missing Children’s Day: “Take 25”

Dating back to 1983 when President Ronald Reagan declared May 25 to be National Missing Children’s Day, this day continues to serve as an annual reminder to all parents to consider their child’s safety a number one priority, while also honoring those children who have been victims of sexual predators. Stop Child Predators encourages all families to help keep the prevention of child exploitation at the forefront of the national agenda and congratulates the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) for launching “Take 25” in recognition of this important day. With a focus on prevention, Take 25 is a new national child safety campaign that asks parents and other trusted adults to spend 25 minutes talking to kids about personal safety and teaching them ways to be safer. To learn more about safety tips and discussion guidelines, please visit www.take25.org.

Teens, Privacy & Online Social Networks: Pew Report Survey Finds Most Teens Restrict Personal Information, Believe Predators Can Still Find Them

Results from a recent Pew Internet & American Life Project survey shows that most teenagers with online social network profiles are taking steps to protect themselves from the most obvious risks. The final report is based on a survey and a series of focus groups, and examines how teens, particularly those with online profiles, make decisions about disclosing or shielding personal information.

According to the report, the majority of teens actively manage their online profiles to keep the information they believe is most sensitive away from strangers, parents and other adults. While many teens post their first name and photos on their profiles, they rarely post information on public profiles they believe would help strangers actually locate them such as their full name, home phone number or cell phone number.



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The report shows that some 55% of teens have online profiles and most of them restrict access to their profile in some way. Of those with profiles, 66% say their profile is not visible to all Internet users. Of those whose profile can be accessed by anyone online, nearly half (46%) say they give at least some false information. Teens post fake information to protect themselves and also to be playful or silly.

At the same time, however, nearly two-thirds of teens with profiles (63%) believe that a motivated person could eventually identify them from the information they publicly provide on their profiles. While most teens take steps to limit what others can know about them from their profiles and postings, they also know that the powerful search tools available to Internet users could help motivated individuals track them down. Some 23% of teen profile creators say it would be “pretty easy” for someone to find out who they are from the information posted to their profile, and 40% of teens with online profiles think that it would be hard for someone to find out who they are from their profile, but that they could eventually be found online. Amanda Lenhart, a senior research specialist at the Pew Internet Project and co-author of the report, says “Teens realize that in some ways they are more accessible when they are online. They try to strike a balance between being safe from strangers and keeping things private from their parents and other adults, while at the same time sharing enough information that allows them to socialize with friends and perhaps even make new friends.” The report also suggests that today’s teens face potential risks associated with online life. Some 32% of online teenagers (and 43% of social-networking teens) have been contacted online by complete strangers and 17% of online teens (31% of social networking teens) have “friends” on their social network profile who they have never personally met.

When broken down by male and female users, the report finds that older female teenagers are more likely than their male peers to use a social networking site; 70 percent of girls ages 15 to 17 have some type of online personal profile, compared to 57 percent of boys within that same age range. The report determined that for girls, social networking sites are primarily places to reinforce pre-existing friendships; for boys, the networks also provide opportunities for flirting as well as making new friends.

Danah Boyd, a researcher at the University of Southern California, says that social networking sites are the new way for this generation to communicate, and that teens create online profiles for social validation and interaction with friends and friends of friends.

If parents have questions regarding online privacy and social networking sites, Internet safety programs such as <http://www.netsmartz411.org/> are available online. Created by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Netsmartz 411 answers parents’ questions regarding Internet safety and technology, and how best to help children avoid potentially dangerous situations. According to Ernie Allen, NCMEC’s CEO, parents will have “direct access to NCMEC experts who can respond to their specific questions and concerns to open up the lines of communication to help bridge the technology gap.”



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The Pew Internet & American Life Project report, entitled, “Teens, Privacy, and Online Social Networks,” is based on a survey conducted by telephone from October 23 through November 19, 2006 among a national sample of 935 youths ages 12 to 17 and on a series of seven focus groups conducted with middle and high-school aged teens in June 2006. The survey has a margin of error in the overall sample of plus or minus 3 percentage points. The report may be found at <http://www.pewinternet.org/topics.asp?c=6> .

STATE ACTIVITIES

Stop Child Predators Congratulates Montana, North Dakota and Texas for Enacting Tough Sex Offender Laws

The Big Sky State

Thanks to the invitation from State Representative John Sinrud (R-Boozeman), the lead sponsor of Jessica’s Law in Montana, Stop Child Predators testified before the Montana House and Senate Judiciary Committees this spring and worked closely with Rep. Sinrud to gain the support of both chambers of the legislature to pass strong sex offender legislation in the state. Conceived from the nationwide model known as Jessica’s Law, Senate Bill 547 requires mandatory minimum sentences and lifetime GPS monitoring for convicted sex offenders. The bill was signed into law by Governor Brian Schweitzer on May 11, 2007.

The law is named after Jessica Lunsford, a nine-year-old Florida girl who was kidnapped, raped and murdered in 2005 by John Couey, a repeat sex offender. A Florida jury convicted Couey in April 2007 and recommended the death penalty. A judge is expected to impose the final sentence in July.

The Peace Garden State

Thanks to the efforts of State Representative Blair Thoreson (R-Fargo), State Senator Carolyn Nelson (D-Fargo), and North Dakota Governor John Hoeven, three bills were signed into law on April 24 that strengthen the state’s penalties, civil commitment, and probation laws for convicted sex offenders.

The first sex offender law Gov. Hoeven signed is Jessica’s Law, a law that requires a mandatory minimum sentence and lifetime GPS monitoring for those convicted of a violent sexual offense. North Dakota joins 30 states in the country having enacted Jessica’s Law; a handful of additional states have something similar to Jessica’s Law.

The second law applies to the courts’ ability to commit a sex offender to the state hospital. Under previous law, two mental health experts must testify that the alleged sex offender has a mental disorder that makes him or her likely to engage in further sexually predatory acts. The new law brings this number down to just one expert. Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem commented on the new law saying it will give courts more leeway in dealing with the most



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serious sex offenders who are likely to re-offend. The third law applies to paroled sex offenders who are monitored with GPS devices. The law toughens the penalties for sex offenders who break the requirements of their monitoring, as set by the court. All three bills received widespread support from both parties in the Legislature.

The Long Horn State

On May 12, the Texas State House and Senate passed Jessica's Law, and Governor Rick Perry signed the bill into law shortly afterwards, making Texas the sixth state in the nation that allows for capital punishment for certain types of sex crimes committed against children. Texas law now calls for a mandatory 25-year sentence for the rape of a child, or in all cases against children between the ages of 7 and 14 that involve a weapon, bodily harm, or kidnapping. The death penalty can be used in cases where sex offenders have been convicted twice of raping a child. The legislation also creates a new charge – continuous sexual abuse of a child – to punish habitual child-sex offenders. Though the House version of the bill would have made that crime eligible for capital punishment on a second conviction, under a compromise, it carries a 25-year minimum sentence. The law also mandates active GPS for all civilly committed sex offenders and clarifies that knowingly harboring a sex offender in violation of registration is a third degree felony, among other provisions.

Delaware Legislature Passes Bill Protecting Child Victims of Sexual Assault, Local Group Says Vote Sends Message that Child Predators Aren't Welcome in State

On June 19, Delaware's House of Representatives unanimously passed the Child Victim's Act (SB 29), a bill that eliminates the two-year civil statute of limitations in cases of child sexual abuse. The Child Victim's Act also provides a two-year window during which claims previously barred by statute could be filed and allows individuals to sue institutions that allowed the abuse to occur through gross negligence. The bill received bipartisan support and passed by unanimous vote when it was introduced in the Senate by its prime sponsor, Sen. Karen Peterson (D-Stanton).

Governor Ruth Ann Minner is expected to sign the bill in July.

Based in Wilmington, DE, local advocacy group Child Victim's Voice helped organize support for the bill and congratulated legislators for their vote noting that the legislation "protect[s] children by exposing sexual predators...and help[s] survivors of childhood sexual abuse take one step toward justice." For more information on the Child Victim's Act, please visit www.childvictimsvoice.org.

Connecticut and Virginia Set Bar for Online Protection of Children

With hundreds of millions of users worldwide, online social networking sites are popular with adolescents and adults alike. But as news reports point out, convicted sex offenders have also found a home on these popular sites – something that concerns parents, legislators, and the creators of such sites.



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In states across the country, MySpace.com is working with legislators on finding a solution that would require MySpace and other online social networking sites to verify the ages indicated by its members.

In Connecticut, for instance, Attorney General Richard Blumenthal pushed for a bill requiring that anyone under 18 need parental permission to join a social networking site, and instituting a \$5,000 fine to the Internet company for failure to gain permission. On a similar note, Virginia Attorney General Robert McDonnell introduced legislation which established a partnership with MySpace.com, as it became the first state to require sex offenders register their online identities. Just as convicted sex offenders register their physical addresses with authorities, the new law requires offenders to register electronic addresses, as well as chat room and instant messaging screen names. This information is cross-referenced with MySpace.com users, and allows MySpace the ability to block a user from entering the site.

At the federal level, Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and John McCain (R-AZ) have proposed similar legislation with stiff penalties for anyone caught lying or falsifying their identities.

JUDICIAL ACTIVITIES

Georgia Supreme Court Hears Challenge to Sex Offender Law

In an effort to make sex offender-free zones, 22 states currently restrict where registered sex offenders can reside. Six states prohibit sex offenders from living within a certain distance from a school, childcare facility, playground, park, or other areas where minors tend to congregate. But lawmakers are finding that such restrictions are now facing court challenges over constitutional concerns.

In Georgia, for instance, the law in part prohibits sex offenders from living within 1,000 feet of a school bus stop and noncompliance puts the sex offender at risk for a ten-year prison term – something that has caused a heated debate among policy makers, state authorities, and the general public, culminating in a court challenge that is before the Georgia State Supreme Court.

Opponents of the law's provision warn that instead of driving sex offenders out of Georgia, the law will instead cause many to go into hiding as they may have no where else to go. Terry Norris of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association says that many of Georgia's 159 county sheriffs have been trying to figure out how to enforce the new law. Even though the association has not taken an official position on the law, sheriffs have lobbied for legislators to remove the bus stop provision, arguing that it represents an arbitrary standard. In many rural school systems, they note, a bus stop is wherever the bus chooses to stop.



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Even officially sanctioned bus stops often change from one semester to another depending on population shifts, which, sheriffs say, could ultimately require offenders to move regularly and could make it difficult to track their whereabouts. In DeKalb County, for instance, Sheriff Thomas Brown mapped out the school buses in his county and found that under the new provision, the county's 490 registered sex offenders would have no place to live. He believes that the provision makes the law unenforceable and says it is unrealistic to believe that all offenders will move from their existing homes, and cautions that his police unit will not necessarily be able to monitor everyone who refuses to move. Additionally, in October 2006, several sheriffs' departments in the state announced that they would refuse to enforce portions of the law that would require evicting elderly or disabled individuals from nursing homes or hospices.

Proponents, however, argue that safety zones and residency restrictions help reduce recidivism rates by keeping potential victims safe and apart from known sex offenders. Residency restrictions, they say, are a form of civil regulation intended to protect the public, not punish sex offenders. Georgia House Majority Leader Jerry Keen (R-St. Simons Island), the lead sponsor of the legislation, responds to critics by saying, "Yes, it's an inconvenience; some folks will have to move. But if you weigh that argument against the overall impact, which is the safety of children, most folks would agree this is a good thing."

The Georgia State Supreme Court is expected to rule on the constitutionality of the Georgia law later this year. To date, courts across the country have upheld similar restrictions in their state sex offender laws.

For more information concerning the initiatives in your state, or if you would like SCP's help in drafting, testifying for, or supporting legislation in your state, please visit our website, <http://www.stopchildpredators.org>, and/or contact us at 202-234-0090.