

Press conference on the passage of the CyberCrimes Against Children Act of 2007.

Attorney General Bill McCollum: First of all I'm just delighted today to be here. I'm Bill McCollum, Attorney General of Florida. I'm sure you're aware that today we've passed or saw the passage in the House, yesterday in the Senate, of the *CyberCrimes Against Children Act of 2007*. It is a tremendous compliment to the Senate and to the House, the leadership, but particularly to the two sponsors Senator Argenziano and House member Representative David Rivera. I want to thank them personally for all the effort they did in sponsoring these bills, this bill, it is now through both bodies going to the governor. It is a step in the right direction and one we have been long waiting for in our cyber crimes unit, and for all of law enforcement that are going to need the tools that are in this bill that significantly expands the punishment as well as new crimes to help us chase down those who would be child pornographers and go on the internet to solicit our children. I'm going to let the legislators explain a little about this in a minute, but I'm also proud that we have the sheriffs behind me today, the Sheriffs' Association president is here with us today, Larry Campbell, we've got Sheriff Rutherford from Jacksonville; we've got sheriffs from Pinellas County, Volusia County, from down in Collier County. And your county I forgot.

Sherriff: Gadsden

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Gadsden, Gadsden I should know that. I'm going to get in real trouble for that. We have Representative Sandy Adams with us today too and Representative Charlie Dean who are both very instrumental and they are going to play a little role in talking to you in just a minute about this. But I want to bring up Sheriff Campbell just for a minute in the beginning because this is very important to them, it's a partnership; what we do in the CyberCrimes Unit with regard to this, and Maureen Horkan is here too. Where's Maureen? I know she's around here somewhere. She's over on the other side, she's hiding. (Beckons her over) Come on you can come over here too. No, Maureen you belong in here with all of us. Maureen Horkan heads the CyberCrime Unit for us, for the Attorney General's Office. This is a partnership with the sheriffs, with all law enforcement, police chiefs as well but particularly the sheriffs in making this work. Sheriff Campbell, where are you? You're over my right shoulder.

Sheriff Larry Campbell: Thank you, General. On behalf of Florida Sheriffs, we want to commend the Attorney General is his efforts to provide for cybercrimes and for the passage of legislation to strengthen penalties. With the growing advances in technology, the volume of cybercrimes uncovered in local jurisdictions is increasing exponentially. To combat these crimes it is essential that we employ cooperative statewide efforts. We have seen positive results from concentrated efforts made to combat the types of crimes such as Polk County CyberHawk operation in March. The Child Predator CyberCrime Unit made up of only three investigators has already done tremendous work in Florida and is one of the highest producing internet crimes against children task force teams in the state and has made four arrests in just over eighteen months. Forty arrests I'm sorry. The rest are carried out cooperatively with assistance from twenty two sheriffs as well as other local law enforcement, FDLE and numerous federal agents. This is the teamwork it

will take to make a difference, against crimes with no jurisdictional boundaries. Cyber crimes provide a thread of unity and focus between Florida sheriff's offices, police departments, FDLE, FBI, ICE, local statewide federal prosecutors and agencies that combat internet crime against children nation wide. We look forward to the continued success and the expansion of the level we've ranked in the state of Florida. Thank you, General.

*Shakes the Attorney General's hand

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Thank you, Sheriff Campbell. Now I'd like to bring up Sheriff Rutherford too, now we're also working very hard and some of the others are going to come in today to now take this legislation and expand our CyberCrimes Unit from six that we have currently in Jacksonville to 56 with the addition of 50 that we have had a lot of help from some of these legislators right here with me today, and that has not quite happened but it is about to happen we think, and I know Sheriff Rutherford wants to comment on that. Sheriff Rutherford.

Sheriff John Rutherford: Thank you, General. My office has been very supportive of the Attorney General's Child CyberCrime Unit since its inception in 2005, in fact we have realized several, in fact over 25 arrests since that beginning; and it's really an easy partnership due to the caliber of the AG's law enforcement team and the great need for this joint effort, to combat this plague of internet sexual predators. The members of the AG's team and in Jacksonville, we actually swore them in, they are special deputies of the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, and we are very proud of that. They work side by side with my vice unit and our cybercrimes unit. In fact we have co-located them, and that breeds even a better partnership. And so that co-location with state, local and we have some federals as well, our immigration customs enforcement team is also co-located with them. So we have a great partnership going and I think today to see the expansion of this partnership would be a tremendous intervention. Thank you, General.

* Sheriff John Rutherford and Attorney General Bill McCollum shake hands

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Thank you very much. Just so you know this, our CyberCrimes Unit has been up and operating with its six personnel up in Jacksonville for about 18 months. They've made 40 arrests and there have been 22 different sheriffs' offices involved in those arrests in the operation of this office so that's a high percentage of the officers in our state and I know that with the additional numbers that we anticipate getting its expanding these offices in Miami, in Ft. Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Tampa, Orlando, Pensacola, Tallahassee and of course Jacksonville, I assume and I believe you should assume that we are going to see sheriffs in every one of our counties being involved in the prosecution of these crimes, the arrest of these crimes in the near future, and we are going to see some people take notice around the country that Florida is the toughest state on child pornographers and child predators on the internet in any of the 50 states. So I think this is exceedingly important. Now I want to bring the stars of today up here for you, the legislators who are doing this. I don't know the pecking order in

seniority, but the ladies first, Senator Argenziano, I know what comes first, ladies come first. She's the senate sponsor so.

Senator Nancy Argenziano: Well thank you so much; our Attorney General, Sir, is the brains here. I appreciate having such a great House sponsor on this bill. He got in office, and he noticed that immediately, that this was a real big problem. Now you know we passed the Jessica Lunsford bill, Charlie and I, and our colleagues and I passed the Jessica Lunsford bill because we have child predators in this state and we wanted to make sure they get the criminal punishment they deserve. But yet, I believe that this is one of the most important bills that we are seeing, especially this session, and for a long time because I know many of you have seen the dateline series, and you see how these people, even when they know. These are sick perverted individuals. They have an insatiable appetite for children, to have sex with children. But Maureen, when she came before our committee and told us about several cases that they were in this state or other states, there was a gentleman (laughs) gentleman, dirtbag, that's the only way to explain him, that was, excuse me, that was caught. He thought he was talking to a young boy, and he was prepared to go meet that young boy. Despite seeing the dateline shows over and over again, he drove to where he believed he was going to meet that young boy, and he had duct tape and knives, and things that could tell you what he was up to and what he was going to do to our children or that child once he got there. So thank God there was law enforcement there. Thank God. What we haven't had in this state was enough people, because those six personnel, and everybody in that CyberCrimes Unit is full time, they are busy. As you see on Dateline these people do not stop, there is something wrong with them. So today, with the passage of this bill, and our Attorney General bringing this forward, that's why I tell you this is so important and I consider this the most important bill that I have seen in a long time, because this will give them the tools. So protecting our children against these monsters, who are there, is to me one of the most important things you can do. With the help of law enforcement, thank you all, and our colleagues who have been so supportive of this. Now we just need to make sure we put our money where our mouth is, make sure that those positions are filled and we give them all the dollars they need. But I want to give the thanks to our Attorney General and my house also.

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Well thank you, thank you very much senator. Without you guys it never would have happened. David Rivera, it was exciting yesterday to see the senate pass the bill, but somehow it was even more exciting today to see you because I know that was the last step.

Representative David Rivera: Thank you for your leadership, the leadership you demonstrated as you were running for office and said that this would be a priority for you once you came into office, and you have fulfilled that commitment, fulfilled that pledge to the people of Florida. I think we are sending that message throughout the nation that Florida is off-limits to sexual predators and particularly Florida is off-limits to those that would prey upon our children through the use of the internet and through the use of technology, particularly to facilitate that contact of that can have such damage on our states children. We know that these are horrific crimes that have been perpetrated against

our children, and Senator Argenziano said it best when she talked about those examples, and I think now with these severe crimes we have said, if you try to use the internet, and you try to participate in these severe crimes, you will pay severe, severe punishment. And I want to also thank my senate sponsor for her wonderful leadership on this, and all the law enforcement folks, my colleagues, Chairman Dean, Chairman Adams for everything they've done in the house and Speaker Rubio. This was a priority, it was a priority for the leadership in the house, the leadership in the senate, and surely for the Attorney General so thank you very much, General.

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Well thank you, David, thank you. Now

Senator Nancy Argenziano: Now General don't forget, when the governor signs the bill
*laughing

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Oh I know the Governor, but I'm assuming he will sign this, and there are very few things you can assume for sure in the government, I know that. But it's a great day for the legislature to do this. And speaking of what we are assuming, we don't know for a fact the budget part is going to come through but I want to introduce right now Representative Charlie Dean. Charlie heads the council that has our budget request for the original fifty, he's been great to support that, has come through the council I understand and there is a budget negotiation with the senate going on, but he's been supportive of this legislation and that, and a former sheriff to boot in Citrus County. Charlie Dean.

Representative Charlie Dean: Thank you General. The issue here is that the cost is above our budget and throughout this whole issue we've focused on the fifty personnel its going to take to effect this legislation. I want to thank the legislature and all the community members of my council that's helped us so dearly in this thing; and stay with us the whole time. It's close, we feel we have the numbers right; we're going get it done for you. And as a former Sheriff I wan to congratulate you and all my former members of the Florida Sheriff's Association being here today, and the Senator and Rivera, thank you very much.

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Well thank you Charlie, I appreciate it. And Representative Sandy Adams chairs the key committee through which all this came. Come up here Sandy. You can't get away without saying something

Representative Sandy Adams: Thank you, Attorney General. My role was very minute although as you know the house and the senates have been very committed to protecting our children, especially when we know that we do have internet predators out there. And unfortunately they are preying on our children way to often. We are sending a message, here today and on forward, they are not welcome in our state, they need to leave our children alone. We are going to do everything we can to protect our children and our citizens. Thank you.

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Thank you. Thank you very much Sandy. Now we have another little special announcement, then we can take questions from you today. But Sheriff Rutherford and the Attorney General's Office, and many patrons of Florida that Alan Worley represents us here today have partnered in something that we are announcing today. Today we are mailing ninety four thousand households in Duval County a mailer that is going to go to those households that have teenagers and children in them that we've identified to give them the kind of notice and awareness campaign that we want them to have about the dangers of cyberspace, MySpace, the internet and cyberspace generally. And so I am very proud of that mailing, we are going to show it to you here, it's going in the mail today. Sheriff Rutherford I am going to call back up for a minute and then Alan Worley but Sheriff Rutherford this is a project we couldn't have done without you, and we'd like other Sheriffs to join you if they will in a similar process.

Sheriff John Rutherford: Well thank you, General. We truly believe that as the AG's Office does, that a well informed community is a safe community. And in Jacksonville we created a fender watch which is actually a website to help parents protect their children from sexual predators. In fact parents can go online and sign up to actually be notified by email through our system, anytime a sexual predator or offender moves within a mile of their residence, and they can also put in their grandparents residences, and other places their children congregate, so that's a great initiative. And we saw this partnership with the Attorney Generals Office, now that they've created their website, and it's loaded with cyber safety tips, and but we also know that today if parents do not get involved and have this information, that they are not nearly as safe as they should be. Today with this mail cards, we are sending a personal invitation to 94,000 homes on the first coast to visit these sites and gain this knowledge. And I want to thank General McCollum for giving us this opportunity to join in this initiative; we thank you also to Alan Worley and the team of Real Money Pages for their designs and contributions. These messages are strictly targeted to the audience that is going to be receiving them. And we hope to show you some bold results from the boldest city in the south, Jacksonville. And General, I have to pause for a moment to thank you for Maureen, she has been a great partner in Jacksonville and I know that we're keeping kids safe there as a result of her initiative, and I want to thank you for her.

*Shake hands

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Well thank you for your partnership. It's my pleasure to work with you on it, and I know Sheriff Campbell and other Sheriffs are interested in trying doing the same type of program in education and we're planning on working with them in not just this, but other types of initiatives going forward to do this. Now is Alan Worley here? Alan where are you? Come up here a second. Alan Worley is Money Pages and I want to recognize the fact that we couldn't do this, we don't have the money to do this and if the Sheriff and Alan hadn't done this mailing, it wouldn't have happened. So come on up here and say a word.

Alan Worley: I want to thank the General for letting us be involved and Sheriff Rutherford and Maureen for letting us be a part of such an important issue. I'm a parent of three children a 12- year-old daughter, a five-year-old daughter and a two year old son and it was important to me, I didn't realize that I needed to be worried about dangers on the internet and after going online, I discovered there are eight predators that live very close to my home. And it scared me to death, and hearing the real life stories of the children that have been victims of this crime it really was a heartfelt feeling for me. And thanks to the Attorney General, he has been able to sponsor a series of these cards that will allow other counties to take this and mimic it in other counties that they can take advantage of. So thank you very much for everything. You're Wonderful as a family and a father. Wonderful.

*shakes hands

Attorney General Bill McCollum: Thank you. Thank you. We are looking for other partnerships and I can assure you, if you haven't noticed, is behind Representative Rivera over here is the sample of that card and what we are putting out and hopefully as I say it will be replicated in other counties throughout Florida.