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FORMER TULARE WESTERN HIGH SCHOOL BAND DIRECTOR SENTENCED TO 6.5 YEARS IN PRISON FOR POSSESSION OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

FRESNO, Calif.—Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that Chief United States District Judge Anthony W. Ishii sentenced RAYMOND HARRY FERENCI, 52, of Tulare, today to six and a half years in prison to be followed by 10 years of supervised release for his conviction of possession of child pornography. One victim has filed a claim for restitution, and the judge has scheduled that matter for a hearing on July 28, 2009 at 9:00 AM.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Fresno Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, which includes the Tulare Police Department, the Fresno County Sheriff's Department, and the Fresno Office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

"This case is particularly troubling because of the defendant's position as someone young people looked up to and respected," said Brian Poulsen, resident agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Fresno. "We have a message for child sex predators like this defendant. ICE will do everything in its power and use every tool at its disposal to keep our children safe – whether those children are around the block or around the world."

According to Assistant United States Attorney David Gappa, who is prosecuting the case, FERENCI admitted that on May 22, 2008, he knowingly possessed on a computer hard drive images of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct. According to previously filed court documents, FERENCI allegedly sent inappropriate text messages to several students at Tulare Western High School. While investigating those allegations, investigators discovered numerous images of child pornography on a laptop computer belonging to and used by FERENCI. During an interview with investigators, FERENCI admitted using a peer-to-peer software program to search for images of child pornography.

A federal indictment against FERENCI was returned on November 20, 2008, and he pleaded guilty on April 6, 2009 to one count of possession of child pornography. He was remanded into federal custody at that time.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood (PSC), a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, PSC marshals federal, state, and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information, visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov or call the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California and ask to speak with the PSC coordinator.

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