



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown  
Eastern District of California

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## **SUSANVILLE MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO PRODUCING SEXUALLY EXPLICIT IMAGES OF MINOR GIRL**

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown announced today that RONALD EUGENE BERNAL, 48, of Susanville, pleaded guilty today before United States District Judge Frank C. Damrell Jr. to two counts of the production and possession of child pornography.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Lassen County Sheriff's Department and the FBI.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Laurel D. White, who is prosecuting the case, BERNAL admitted to taking photographs of his five-year-old niece in June 2008 when the girl was visiting him and his wife in Susanville, in Lassen County. His wife learned of the photographs when she found a digital memory card that BERNAL had dropped, and then viewed the images on the card. She later reported her findings to Lassen County Sheriff's deputies who after their initial investigation, referred the case to the FBI

BERNAL, who is in custody, is scheduled to be sentenced on January 11, 2010. He faces a 15-year mandatory minimum to a 30-year maximum term in prison for the production charge, and a maximum 10-year term in prison for the possession charge. Each charge also carries a possible fine of \$250,000; a \$100 special assessment; and a five-year to life term of supervised release. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The defendant has also agreed to forfeit the digital camera and equipment he used in furtherance of his offenses and to pay restitution to the victim of his offense.

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](http://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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