



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill  
Middle District of Florida

Tampa

Orlando

Jacksonville

Ocala

Fort Myers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**U.S. ATTORNEY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERS**  
**ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO "TAKE 25"**

*Parents encouraged to take 25 minutes to talk about child safety*

U.S. Attorney Robert E. O'Neill and representatives of several federal, state and local law enforcement agencies are observing National Missing Children's Day today by participating in the national Take 25 child safety campaign.

May 25 has been observed as National Missing Children's Day since it was first observed in 1983. National Missing Children's Day serves as an annual reminder that there are thousands of children who are still missing and stresses the importance of making child protection a national priority. The Take 25 campaign is a national child safety public awareness campaign created in 2007 by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The campaign encourages parents to take 25 minutes to talk to their children about safety and ways to prevent abduction.

The Department of Justice is committed to the safety and well-being of our children and has placed a high priority on protecting and combating sexual exploitation of minors. In 2006 Project Safe Childhood was launched by the Department of Justice as a unified and comprehensive strategy to combat child exploitation by combining law enforcement efforts, community action, and public awareness. It marshals federal, state, and local resources to better locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals, who exploit children via the internet, and to identify and rescue victims. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) estimates that 10 percent of those depicted in commonly traded images are infants and toddlers, and 67 percent are prepubescent children. The goal of Project Safe Childhood is to reduce the incidence of sexual exploitation of children.

From October 1, 2009 through September 30, 2010, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Florida, with the close assistance of numerous federal, state, and local

agencies, brought 70 Project Safe Childhood cases – the second highest of any district in the country. The charges in those cases vary by defendant, but they include conspiring to travel in interstate commerce to engage in illicit sexual conduct, production of child pornography, distribution and receipt of child pornography, and possession of child pornography. These cases were brought by each of the five offices of the Middle District of Florida. At the end of this release are summaries of recent significant Project Safe Childhood cases prosecuted in the Middle District.

Law enforcement agencies participating in the press conference include the Federal Bureau of Investigation; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations; the United States Secret Service; the United States Postal Inspection Service; the United States Marshals Service; the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; the Brevard County Sheriff’s Office; the Orange County Sheriff’s Office; the Orlando Police Department; the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office; the Polk County Sheriff’s Office; and the Volusia County Sheriff’s Office.

As part of its public outreach efforts, the Department of Justice has launched a web site that highlights the work of the U.S. Attorney’s Offices across the country. This new site, the “Briefing Room,” is available at [www.justice.gov/usao/briefing\\_room/index.html](http://www.justice.gov/usao/briefing_room/index.html) and offers news, videos, photos, statistics, and other information on significant issues. Each month, the Briefing Room will feature a different Department of Justice priority area. The inaugural edition of the Briefing Room is dedicated to Project Safe Childhood (“PSC”), the Department of Justice initiative that is aimed at protecting children from sexual abuse and exploitation. The site includes press releases on significant PSC cases, statistics on convictions and sentences in PSC cases, and prevention and Internet safety resources.

For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit [www.projectsafechildhood.gov](http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov).

To report cases of child exploitation, please visit [www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com).

## **Middle District of Florida Project Safe Childhood Case Highlights**

*U.S. Attorney O'Neill stressed, as to defendants whose matters are pending, charges are not evidence of guilt. Charges are only allegations, and each defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.*

### **Fort Myers**

Candice Marie Miller (31, Alva) was charged in October 2010 with one count of possession of child pornography, two counts of transportation child pornography, and two counts of production of child pornography. If convicted, Miller faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison for the possession charge; a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years and a maximum of 20 years in federal prison for each of the transportation charges; and a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years and a maximum of 30 years in federal prison for each of the production charges. Miller currently has a July trial date.

Brenton Lawrence Frank (20, Fort Myers) was charged in February 2011 with one count of possession of child pornography, and one count of distribution of child pornography. If convicted, Frank faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison for the possession charge, and a mandatory minimum sentence of 5 years and a maximum of 20 years in federal prison for the distribution charge. Frank currently has an August trial date.

### **Jacksonville**

Former school teacher Ripley Ridenour (56, Jacksonville) was sentenced to 210 months in federal prison and a lifetime of supervised release for receipt of child pornography.

Kevin Robert Leblanc (48, New Hampshire) pled guilty on May 6, 2011 to a federal charge of failure to register as a sex offender. According to court documents, Leblanc was previously convicted of rape and abuse of a child under 16 and indecent assault and battery of a child under 14. Leblanc was arrested for shoplifting in Lake City, Florida. Leblanc is currently in custody and faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in federal prison for failure to register as a sex offender.

On January 10, 2011 Ian Sean Gordon (age 29, Tallahassee) was sentenced to life in federal prison for child sex trafficking. According to court documents, the minor victim was a 15-year-old female. The minor and several friends ran away from a juvenile treatment facility in Jacksonville. The victim ultimately ended up with Gordon and for a

period of 10 to 14 days performed commercial sex acts at his command at least 50 times.

Gordon harbored the child, provided food, shelter and illegal drugs to the child, derived, in part, from the money the child earned while engage in commercial sex acts. According to the child, as a result of the force and threats of force, she did what Gordon demanded, to include commercial sex acts, out of fear of being hurt or killed and out of fear of what Gordon might do to her family members. The child eventually escaped and made contact with her mother. Six additional individuals were charged involving this same minor victim.

### Tampa

Timothy Scott Bidwell (49, Sarasota) was sentenced on May 6, 2011 to 22 years in federal prison for using the internet in an attempt to induce and persuade a minor to engage in sex acts with him. According to court documents, Bidwell posted an ad on internet website soliciting a mother who was willing to share her daughter for sex. For two days, Bidwell communicated online with an undercover detective who he believed to be a mother willing to share her 11 and 14 year old daughters. He was arrested when he travelled from Sarasota to Clearwater to meet, who he believed to be, the mother and daughters to engage in sexual activity.

Francois Piedra (21, Lakeland) was sentenced on May 6, 2011 to 15 years in federal prison for distribution and possession of child pornography. According to court documents, Piedra distributed child pornography to an FBI agent using a peer-to-peer file-sharing program. Agents found more than 10,000 pictures and 451 videos depicting the rape, sexual torture and sexual exploitation of primarily prepubescent boys and infants. Piedra admitted to agents that he had been collecting child pornography since he was 12 years old and that he had chatted with minors about sex on numerous internet websites.

Kenneth Blage (42, Zephyrhills) was sentenced on August 24, 2010 to 60 years in federal prison for producing child pornography. According to court documents, in April 2009 law enforcement received information that Blage had engaged in sexual activity with a fifteen year old girl and a thirteen year old girl. Blage told authorities he was the children's caretaker and had not had inappropriate contact with either child. In July 2009, Blage's roommate brought authorities a computer hard drive, two CDs, and two memory cards that Blage had previously asked him to destroy. Officers reviewed the images and discovered numerous sexually explicit photos of Blage and the two girls. In addition, Blage had also physically abused one of the victims including burning her neck with a cigarette, throwing a frying pan at her and drawing blood by slapping her face.

John Kandis (44, Clearwater) was sentenced on December 21, 2010 to 188 months in federal prison. Kandis, a convicted sex offender, was on state probation when he used a computer at his ex-wife's apartment to download child pornography, which he then posted for sharing. When agents tracked him down (at another location), they searched his electronic media and found that he had child pornography on his laptop, thousands of child erotica images and 55 videos, some of which contained children as young as five years old. The agents also found child pornography images on his PlayStation.

### **Orlando**

On September 17, 2010, William Ciccotto (52, Micco) was sentenced to 30 years in federal prison, to be followed by a life term of supervised release, for producing child pornography. According to the plea agreement, Ciccotto created a fictitious Myspace account in the name of "Cindy Westin," and posed as a young girl between the ages of 13 and 14 years old. Ciccotto, acting as "Cindy Westin," sent friend requests to young girls on Myspace, befriended these children, and persuaded them to take sexually explicit pictures of themselves and send the pictures to his email account.

Dennis Brian Devlin (57, Daytona Beach) pled guilty on April 21, 2011 to aiding and abetting Michael Ehmen (20, Daytona Beach) in the sexual exploitation of a child. Ehmen pled guilty on April 5, 2011 to sexual exploitation of a child. Both men face a mandatory minimum of 15 years and a maximum penalty of 30 years in federal prison. According to the plea agreement, on or about January 20, 2011 and January 22, 2011, Devlin and Ehmen, aiding and abetting each other, persuaded and employed a 13-year-old child to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing visual depictions of that conduct. On both dates, Ehmen drove the child to the Desert Inn in Daytona Beach, Florida, where Devlin, using an iPhone and video camera, took pictures and video of the child being made to engage in sexually explicit activity. Devlin, who lived and worked at the Desert Inn, and identified himself as the manager/owner of the resort, paid Ehmen for bringing the child to him for photographing. Ehmen's sentencing hearing is scheduled for July 8, 2011 and Devlin's sentencing hearing is scheduled for July 29, 2011.