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**ESSEX MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ATTEMPTING TO ERASE COMPUTER FILES IN
A CHILD PORNOGRAPHY INVESTIGATION**

Baltimore, Maryland - James A. Vilkas, age 25, of Essex, Maryland, pleaded guilty today to seeking to obstruct a federal child pornography investigation by erasing images from his computer, announced United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein.

According to Vilkas' guilty plea, on January 26, 2008, a woman advised the Baltimore County Police that she believed her 14-year old daughter had met an adult male, only known to her as "Jimmy", on the Internet social networking website MySpace.com. The woman provided "Jimmy's" cell phone number to the officer. Baltimore County officers contacted "Jimmy," who was James Anthony Vilkas, and asked him to come in for an interview the next day. During the interview on January 27, 2008, Vilkas admitted to meeting the girl on MySpace.com and that he continued to contact her via e-mail and cell phone, even after she advised him that she was 14 years old. Vilkas told the officers that he invited the minor female to his house on January 26, 2008 and that they engaged in sexual activity.

At a second interview conducted with Vilkas on January 28, 2008, Vilkas admitted that he asked the minor female to send him sexually explicit pictures via e-mail, which she did. Vilkas also informed officers that he used his computer to download other pornography which may include videos of minors engaged in sexually explicit activities. A search warrant was executed at Vilkas' home that same day. Upon entering the bedroom belonging to Vilkas, officers saw that a program designed to erase data from the computer was running on the computer. The program was immediately stopped in an attempt to preserve evidence. Vilkas' computers were seized and submitted for forensic examination pursuant to a federal search warrant. One of the files located on the desktop computer is a log of an Internet chat occurring on January 27, 2008, between James Vilkas, and "Coren." In the chat Vilkas requested assistance from "Coren" in erasing his computer hard drive.

Vilkas used computer software from January 27 through January 28, 2008 to erase the pictures sent to him by the 14 year old minor female so that they would not be discovered by law enforcement authorities.

Vilkas faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. U.S. District Judge Catherine C. Blake has scheduled sentencing for November 13, 2009 at 11:30 a.m.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, 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 (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafefchildhood.gov. Details about Maryland's program are available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/md/Safe-Childhood/index.html>.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein praised the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Baltimore County Police Department and Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger for their work in this investigation and prosecution. Mr. Rosenstein thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Bonnie S. Greenberg who is prosecuting the case.