

For Immediate Release
July 7, 2011

**CIMARRON MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO FEDERAL
CHILD PORNOGRAPHY OFFENSE**

ALBUQUERQUE – This morning in federal court in Albuquerque, **Brandon Hronich**, 27, of Cimarron, New Mexico, entered a guilty plea to an information charging him with receipt of a visual depiction of a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct under a plea agreement with the United States Attorney's Office. Under the terms of the plea agreement, Hronich will be sentenced to ten years of imprisonment to be followed by a lifetime of supervised release. Hronich also will be required to register as a sex offender when he completes his prison sentence. Hronich has been in federal custody since his arrest on September 15, 2010, and will remain detained pending his sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that Hronich was arrested on a federal criminal complaint filed as part of Operation Predator. Operation Predator was an investigative effort by state and local law enforcement affiliates of the New Mexico Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force aimed at identifying individuals throughout New Mexico involved in the distribution, receipt, and possession of child pornography through peer-to-peer file sharing programs. Twenty-two search warrants were executed and eight defendants were arrested in late September 2010 as a result of Operation Predator.

In his plea agreement, Hronich admitted that, on September 15, 2010, investigators with the ICAC Task Force executed a search warrant at his residence in Cimarron and seized his computers and computer-related media. The search warrant was based on information obtained during an undercover operation by the New Mexico State Police aimed at identifying individuals who possess, receive and/or distribute child pornography. Hronich voluntarily submitted to a

tape-recorded interview with ICAC Task Force investigators and investigators from the Eighth Judicial District Attorney's Office during which he admitted to downloading images and videos of child pornography by using peer-to-peer file-sharing programs.

In his plea agreement, Hronich acknowledged that a forensic examination of his computers and computer-related media uncovered 1500 images and one video of child pornography. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has determined that the child pornography images found on Hronich's computers and computer-related media included 385 images and one video of 47 children who have been identified as child pornography victims and have been rescued.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Charlyn E. Rees and was investigated by the New Mexico State Police, the Eighth Judicial District Attorney's Office, and other agencies that participate in the ICAC Task Force. The law enforcement agencies that participated in Operation Predator include: Albuquerque Police Department, Farmington Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Las Cruces Police Department, New Mexico Attorney General's Office, New Mexico State Police, Rio Rancho Police Department, Santa Fe Police Department, the United States Marshal's Office in Las Cruces, the First Judicial District Attorney's Office, the Fifth Judicial District Attorney's Office, and the Eighth Judicial District Attorney's Office.

Operation Predator was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by United States Attorneys' Offices and DOJ's Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, 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.

Operation Predator also was brought as part of the New Mexico ICAC Task Force whose mission it is to locate, track, and capture Internet child sexual predators and Internet child pornographers in New Mexico. There are 61 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies associated with Task Force, which is funded by a grant administered by the New Mexico Attorney General's Office. Anyone with information relating to suspected child predators and suspected child abuse is encouraged to contact federal or local law enforcement.

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