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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 5, 2012

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INDICTMENTS RETURNED IN HAMMOND FEDERAL COURT

Hammond, Indiana- The United States Attorney's Office announced that the following Indictments were returned on January 4, 2012:

- Armando Velasquez, 24, of East Chicago, Indiana, was charged in an Indictment with being a felon in possession of a firearm. Velasquez has a prior conviction for voluntary manslaughter. These charges were filed as the result of an investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. This case has been assigned to and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney David Nozick.
- Victor Wiggins, 29, of Gary, Indiana, was charged in an Indictment with being a felon in possession of a firearm. Wiggins has prior convictions for attempted aggravated battery and felony battery. These charges were filed as the result of an investigation by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives. This case has been assigned to and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Chang-Adiga.
- Robert A. Billings, 33, of Valparaiso, Indiana, was charged in an Indictment with receipt of child pornography and possession of child pornography. An investigation revealed probable cause to believe that a user of an IP address identified as belonging to Billings made available for sharing multiple child pornography images via a peer-to-peer file sharing program between January 2011 and March 2011. A federal search warrant was subsequently obtained and executed at the residence, where law enforcement found numerous computers, hard drives, digital storage media and related items. An onsite preview conducted by law enforcement found images of child pornography. **This case resulted from an investigation by members of the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, including the U.S. Immigration and Custom Office of Homeland Security Investigations.** This case has been assigned to and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jill Koster.

Anyone with information about this case is urged to contact Homeland Security Investigations at (219) 937-5500.

- Ramon D. Salinas, Jr., 35, of East Chicago, Indiana, was charged in an Indictment with distribution of child pornography and possession of child pornography. Salinas is a registered sex offender in Indiana due to a prior possession of child pornography conviction.

The investigation into Salinas' conduct began in September 2011, when law enforcement working in an undercover capacity used a publicly available peer-to-peer file sharing program to download from a user multiple video files depicting children engaged in sexually explicit conduct. The results of an administrative subpoena issued to the internet service provider of the user identified the address of a residence located in Hammond, Indiana. A federal search warrant was subsequently obtained and executed at the residence, where law enforcement found over 60 videos with titles indicative of child pornography on one laptop computer belonging to Salinas.

This case resulted from an investigation by members of the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, including the U.S. Immigration and Custom Office of Homeland Security Investigations, the Indiana State Police, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department and the Highland Police Department. This case has been assigned to and will be prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jill Koster.

Anyone with information about this case is urged to contact Homeland Security Investigations at (219) 937-5500.

The Billings and Salinas cases were 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.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The specific sentence in each case to be imposed upon conviction will be determined by the judge after a consideration of federal sentencing statutes and the Federal Sentencing Guidelines.

The United States Attorney's Office emphasized that an Indictment is merely an allegation and that all persons charged are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.