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SOLOMONS MAN SENTENCED TO 12 YEARS IN PRISON
FOR PRODUCING CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Typical of the Predators Children Routinely Encounter on the Internet

Greenbelt, Maryland - U.S. District Judge Roger W. Titus sentenced Joshua P. Blakenship, age 25, of Solomons, Maryland, today to 12 years in prison followed by a lifetime of supervised release for producing child pornography. Judge Titus ordered that upon his release from prison, Blakenship must register as a sex offender in the place where he resides, where he is an employee, and where he is a student, under the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA).

The sentence was announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein; Special Agent in Charge William Winter of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); Calvert County Sheriff Mike Evans; and the Rapid City South Dakota Police Department.

"Joshua Blankenship is typical of the predators children routinely encounter on the internet," said U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein.

"Individuals that sexually exploit children think they can hide behind their computers and not be discovered by law enforcement," said Special Agent in Charge of HSI Baltimore William Winter. "Think again. HSI special agents along with our domestic and international law enforcement partners have joined forces to aggressively investigate and apprehend these predators and ensure that they are prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

According to his plea agreement, Blakenship "friended" a teenage girl on Facebook in January 2011. They exchanged text messages and by March 2011, Blankenship asked the girl for a nude photo of herself. The girl sent Blakenship a nude photo she took on her cell phone.

On July 4, 2011, Blankenship sent a text message to the girl demanding 10 nude pictures and said that if she did not produce and send the photos, she would go to jail because she had sent an illegal image on her cell phone. Between July 5 and 7, 2011, Blakenship sent numerous texts describing the images he wanted her to produce and threatening

to call the police if she refused. The victim produced several dozen pictures and sent them to Blakenship.

Blakenship was identified and his residence searched on August 5, 2011. Blakenship admitted to forcing individuals to send him pictures, and to creating a fake profile on the Internet to gain access to pictures and videos of girls.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who sexually exploit children, and to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.usdoj.gov/psc For more information about internet safety education, please visit www.usdoj.gov/psc and click on the "resources" tab on the left of the page.

This investigation was part of Operation Predator, a nationwide HSI initiative to protect children from sexual predators, including those who travel overseas for sex with minors, Internet child pornographers, criminal alien sex offenders and child sex traffickers. HSI encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE or by completing its online tip form. Both are staffed around the clock by investigators.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein commended HSI Baltimore, Calvert County Sheriff's Office and Rapid City, South Dakota Police Department for their work in the investigation. Mr. Rosenstein thanked Special Assistant U.S. Attorney LisaMarie Freitas of the U.S. Justice Department, Criminal Division, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Kristi N. O'Malley, who prosecuted the case.

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