



Department of Justice

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HOGSETT ANNOUNCES BREAKUP OF LONG-RUNNING INTERNATIONAL CHILD PORNOGRAPHY RING

Eleven defendants charged with promoting, exchanging videos and images of child exploitation

PRESS RELEASE

INDIANAPOLIS – Joseph H. Hogsett, the United States Attorney, announced today that federal prosecutors have charged eleven men with participating in what is alleged to have been a worldwide child exploitation ring. Those defendants include Indianapolis and Anderson-area defendants who allegedly participated in a conspiracy to distribute and receive videos and images of child exploitation.

“This conspiracy allegedly stretched across the country and around the world, using sophisticated techniques to hide the orchestrated abuse of dozens of child victims,” Hogsett said. “As these men have learned, though, you aren’t anonymous online – if you engage in this type of behavior, you will be identified and you will face justice.”

“Child pornography and the sexual exploitation of children are crimes that attack the most innocent of victims,” said U.S. Postal Inspector in Charge Gerald O’Farrell. “The U.S. Postal Inspection Service has a long and successful history of investigating crimes against children, and is dedicated to bringing criminals who use the mail for the transport of child pornography to justice.”

According to an indictment unsealed this week, the alleged conspiracy began sometime in 2000 and operated continuously until April 2012. The charged individuals allegedly ran various online chat rooms that were protected by a password that was available exclusively to members of the conspiracy. These chat rooms were allegedly dedicated to the distribution, receipt and possession of child pornography, and were used by its members as a forum to discuss and promote the sexual exploitation of children.

The indictment alleges that many of the conspiracy members had amassed large collections of materials depicting child exploitation. Using these chat rooms and a number of online servers, the co-conspirators allegedly sought to expand their collections and evade law enforcement through the use of sophisticated data encryption software.

In addition, at least four of the defendants allegedly conspired to sexually exploit children and produce new videos and images of that abuse, which could then be distributed to members of the group. Hogsett said that as part of this investigation, nearly one-hundred children around the world have been identified as victims of abuse.

The American defendants charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office include:

John Edwards, age 61, of Indianapolis
Thomas Vaughn, age 44, of Anderson
John Rex Powell, age 42, of Fort Myers, Florida
Donald Printup, age 35, of Niagara Falls, New York
Michael Fredette, age 45, of Waterford, New York
Robert Guillen, age 42, of Wesley Chapel, Florida
David Bebetu, age 50, of Agoura Hills, California
Stephen Harvey Dault, age 47, of McKinney, Texas
Rick Ricardo Leon, age 52, of Arlington, Virginia
John David Gries, age 47, of Bayshore, New York
James McCullars, age 55, of Huntsville, Alabama

Hogsett noted that additional defendants have been charged or are under investigation in other jurisdictions, including Canada, Switzerland, and other nations.

One of the charged defendants, John Rex Powell, had previously been charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office as part of an investigation and prosecution of two Australian citizens who allegedly orchestrated the sexual abuse of their adopted son at the hands of a number of men around the world. Hogsett said that Powell's alleged involvement in both schemes was key in dismantling this conspiracy.

According to Senior Litigation Counsel Steven D. DeBrotta and Assistant U.S. Attorney Brant Cook, who are prosecuting the case for the government along with Trial Attorney Amy Larson with Department of Justice – Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, the eleven defendants all face up to decades in prison if they are convicted. They also could face significant fines, as well as lifetime supervised release and registration as a sexual offender.

This case was the result of a collaborative investigation led by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service assisted by the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and the Department of Justice's High Technology Investigative Unit, as part of Project Safe Childhood. Led nationally 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.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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