



# Department of Justice

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WESTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA

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**U.S. ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES**  
**2005-06**  
**INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN STATISTICS**

*Local U.S. Attorney's Office Part of Larger Partnership  
Aimed at Reducing Internet Crimes  
of Sexual Enticement, Abuse, and Child Pornography*

**CHARLOTTE, NC** - United States Attorney Gretchen C.F.

Shappert today announces the work of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina since January of 2005 with regard to federal prosecutions of Internet crimes against children and other crimes of child sexual exploitation. "We have no higher calling than the protection of our children from those who would target them for harm," said Shappert.

In February of 2006 Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales announced Project Safe Childhood, a United States Justice Department

initiative aimed at preventing the abuse and exploitation of children through the Internet.

One of the paramount goals for the U.S. Attorney is to make the Western District of North Carolina a very uncomfortable place for child predators, especially those who use the Internet or computers to victimize children. In attaining this goal, the U.S. Attorney is partnered with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the local FBI task force which trains the energy of numerous special agents on this type of crime, alone. Also partnered with the United States Attorney's Office are several dedicated federal agents and inspectors with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation. The NC SBI is responsible in North Carolina for leading the Internet Crimes Against Children task force, a statewide cooperative effort, which employs a number of state and local law enforcement agents and officers located at various sites statewide, and works hand-in-glove with the FBI task force.

Already, the United States Justice Department, working with federal, state, and local partners across the country, has accomplished a great deal. The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina, working in conjunction with its law enforcement partners, has accomplished a great deal locally, as well. For example, in calendar year 2005, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of North Carolina charged ten (10) individuals with various crimes associated with sexual enticement of children, sexual abuse of children, and/or possession and/or distribution of child pornography. Eight of those individuals presently stand convicted. Of those eight, four have been sentenced. Those four sentences range from 12 years to approximately two and a half years in federal prison. The prison terms will be followed by lengthy periods of supervised release (three years to life). Federal sentences are served without the possibility of parole. Five individuals charged in 2005 are currently awaiting sentencing. One individual was acquitted by a jury at trial and one had charges dismissed.

In calendar 2006 in the Western District of North Carolina, there have been 15 individuals charged to date on various felony counts under

the sexual exploitation of children and/or transportation for illegal sexual activity statutes of the United States Code. Eight of those individuals are currently awaiting sentencing, all of them having entered pleas of guilty. One of the 15 charged in 2006 has been sentenced; that defendant received nine years in federal prison, followed by a life term of supervised release. The remainder of those charged in 2006 are pending trial at this time.

Individuals who use the Internet to persuade or entice a minor to engage in illegal sexual conduct now face no less than 10 years in federal prison (commonly known as a “mandatory minimum” sentence) and a maximum statutory penalty of life imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$250,000 on the one count. The mandatory minimum penalty for this particular federal offense was elevated as of July 2006. Those convicted of crimes associated with transportation and/or traveling to meet with or engage in illegal sex with children are often sentenced to life terms of supervised release following long periods of time in prison.

Millions of American families with school-aged children own a personal computer which sits in their homes. Millions of school-aged

children use those computers every afternoon, or every night while doing their homework. Millions of American children use the Internet to help them with their homework assignments, and they also use the Internet to communicate with one another.

Frighteningly, but true, the children are also often communicating with strangers online via the Internet. Just as often, the children are not fully aware of the very real danger of meeting with and talking with strangers in chat rooms online. Even more often, though they have been warned, children do not believe that chatting online with strangers in obscure chat rooms can be harmful to them or ever lead to a real physical encounter. The fact that they are children, not yet capable of understanding the deadly hook accompanying the attractive lures of child sexual predators, forms the basis for the very danger that many of our children deny even exists. Not only do many children often dismiss the notion of there being any real danger online, they think it is harmless fun to pretend to be older than they are, or take on various roles while chatting with strangers online.

The reality for children and for parents everywhere is that the true horrors lurking in the dark waters underneath these young Internet “surfers” pose very real dangers that make every scary movie or Halloween haunted house, all rolled together into one, pale in comparison. The haunted houses of Halloween present quick shocks by someone, otherwise harmless, posing as something, though frightening, is not real. The child predators who are present and working online all the time are, in contrast, very real and deadly threats, posing as a harmless friend, with money and gifts. These adult predators are very serious about their very bad intentions, and they are relentless. If a true encounter between an unwitting child and a child predator ensues from what began as “harmless” Internet chat, that encounter could very well prove to be a deadly one. Such encounters can spell the end of a child’s life or the end of a child’s innocence, neither of which the Justice Department and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of North Carolina are willing to tolerate.

These federal cases are currently being brought as part of the Attorney General’s Project Safe Childhood initiative. Project Safe

Childhood was formally rolled out in February 2006 and represents a nationwide plan designed to protect children from online exploitation and abuse. Project Safe Childhood creates in every federal jurisdiction locally designed partnerships of federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers to investigate and prosecute Internet-based crimes against children. With the U.S. Attorney as the convenor, local communities have designed and begun to implement programs that are uniquely tailored to their needs. In North Carolina, with the expertise of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, the government is maximizing the impact of national and statewide resources and expertise. A Project Safe Childhood partnership has been built in the Western District of North Carolina at this time with the development of a strategic plan and plans for reporting the work accomplished in order to ensure accountability to the overall goals of the Project. Led by United States Attorneys Offices all across the country, 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 identify and rescue victims.

The five major components of Project Safe Childhood are:

- Integrated Federal, state, and local efforts to investigate and prosecute child exploitation cases, and to identify and rescue child victims.
- Participation in coordinated national initiatives.
- Increased federal involvement in child pornography and enticement cases.
- Training of federal, state, and local law enforcement.
- Community awareness and educational programs.

For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit

[www.projectsafchildhood.gov/.](http://www.projectsafchildhood.gov/)”

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