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**FORMER YOUTH MINISTER AND OWNER OF HALF BACK MEDIA
PLEADS GUILTY IN FEDERAL COURT TO ENTICING A MINOR
TO ENGAGE IN SEXUAL CONDUCT**

LAFAYETTE, La.: U.S. Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced today that a former Youth Minister and owner of Half Back Media, pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court before the Honorable C. Michael Hill, to enticing a minor to engage in criminal sexual activity.

Eric Michael Manuel, 23, of Lafayette, La., was indicted by a federal grand jury in January of 2012, with 18 counts of production of child pornography and two counts of using a facility in interstate commerce to persuade a minor to engage in criminal sexual acts. During a change of plea hearing held today, Manuel pleaded guilty to one count of using a facility in interstate commerce to persuade a minor to engage in criminal sexual acts.

In the factual basis for the guilty plea filed with the Court, Manuel admitted that he would text underage boys in an effort to convince them to engage in sexual acts with the him. As a result of the enticement, two boys engaged in sexual acts with the defendant. Manuel would pay the boys to allow him to perform oral sex upon them. The defendant attempted to entice a third boy to engage in sexual conduct with him, but the boy refused.

Manuel admitted to creating a Facebook page in the name of a young girl, Emily Brandt. While using the false persona of Emily, Manuel convinced 18 boys between the ages of 13 and 17 to produce sexually explicit images and videos of themselves and send them to him. When one boy refused to send the sexually explicit images to Manuel, he threatened the boy.

At sentencing, Manual faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years to life in prison, a fine of up to \$250,000.00, and a term of supervised release of not less than five years to life, in addition to the term of imprisonment imposed by the Court.

United States Attorney Finley stated, "Parents should be aware that these predators are out there, and they focus their attention on young boys as well as girls. They will stop at nothing and prey on as many children they can find. They will use money to entice and threats to force their will upon your kids. We will continue to prosecute these criminals to the fullest extent of the law."

This case is being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Lafayette Resident Agency, the Louisiana State Police and the Lafayette Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John Luke Walker.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse launched 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 U.S. Attorney's Office and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Homeland Security Investigations/Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) encourages the public to report suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators.

The number for the Lafayette FBI Office is: 337-233-2164.

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