



Remarks of United States Attorney Timothy J. Heaphy

April 21, 2014

I. Introduction

Thank you all for coming today. My name is Tim Heaphy and I am the United States Attorney for the Western District of Virginia. I am joined today by Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Richmond Division, Adam Lee.

We are here today to announce a guilty plea involving the criminal prosecution of Michael Morris, who was formerly employed as a Dean at the University of Virginia. Mr. Morris pleaded guilty today to offenses involving child pornography. His conviction provides us with an opportunity to talk more broadly about child exploitation – what we are doing in law enforcement to combat exploitation, and what you – parents in this community – can do to protect your children from becoming victims.

II. United States v. Michael Morris

In January 2012 a Federal Bureau of Investigation Task Force Officer Located in North Carolina was working undercover as part of an FBI task force. He was searching an online, peer-to-peer file sharing website in search of images of child pornography. There are several of these sites – dark corners of the internet where child pornographers share images with others who share their deviant interest.

In his undercover capacity, this agent came across a user by the name of “Funshooter2006,” who appeared to have images of child pornography to share. “Funshooter 2006” was the nickname adopted by Michael G. Morris of Crozet, Virginia, who was at the time, working as an Associate Dean at the University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce. Morris was a paid subscriber to the file sharing website and had several hundred “friends” and numerous child pornography images available to share with other users of this internet website. He offered a different folder of images to at least some of those users willing to share their collection with him.

The undercover agent engaged in communication with Morris concerning their purported mutual interests in girls and “teen stuff.” During that 2012 exchange and another online session in March 2013, the agent was able to download videos of explicit child pornography which Morris had made available for other users.

These and other files contained in Morris' file sharing account largely involved teenage girls engaging in sexually explicit conduct. They also, however, included pornographic images depicting prepubescent minors engaged in sex acts with adults.

On November 6, 2013, a search warrant was executed at Morris's home and Morris was arrested. His computers were seized and subsequently examined by forensics professionals at the Department of Justice's High Technology Investigative Unit which is part of DOJ's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section in Washington. That analysis revealed that Morris possessed more than a thousand images of child pornography and child erotica, including hundreds of videos depicting children engaged in sexually explicit conduct, many of which he made available to his "friends" on the website. The forensic examination of Morris' computers also revealed "chat" sessions in which Morris interacted with like-minded individuals about their deviant interests in minors.

Morris was cooperative upon his arrest. He admitted the possession and distribution of child pornography. He also admitted that he enticed minor females to masturbate for him on webcam. He further admitted to sending videos of 16 and 17 year old girls masturbating to individuals he would chat with on certain websites. Morris admitted to pretending to be a 16 or 17 year old girl

with other men on chatting websites. However, he denied ever having sexual contact with minors.

Shortly after his arrest Morris was charged via a federal indictment. Today he pled guilty to two counts of distributing or receiving images of child pornography and one count of possessing child pornography. At sentencing, Morris faces a mandatory minimum of 5 years in prison on each of the distribution/receipt charges, with a possible sentence of up to 20 years in prison. He also faces a possible sentence of up to 10 years on the possession charge.

I want to thank the law enforcement agents who were responsible for the investigation and prosecution of Michael Morris. In particular, I want to thank the FBI (both local agents and agents from Richmond) and the Charlottesville Police Department, including local detective Nick Rudman, who is an FBI Task Force Officer who works extensively on these cases. I also want to acknowledge the work of the North Carolina TFO whose undercover work led to the discovery of the crimes committed by Michael Morris.

III. Forms of Child Exploitation

Mr. Morris exploited children in multiple ways via the internet. His ability to amass such a significant collection of child pornography and his repeated contact with teenagers via web cam demonstrates how dangerous the internet

can be – something we want to ensure parents understand in the wake of this case.

The popularity of internet chat rooms and social networking web sites presents a target rich environment for predators. More and more people, particularly young people, have joined these networks. They create profiles with personal information that is accessible to strangers. They also use programs, like Snapchat, that they falsely believe will allow them to control the dissemination of self-produced pictures. Communication via these programs and the use of ever-expanding technology can create a sense of intimacy and familiarity very quickly, even across long distances.

This is exciting technology that can connect us. It is also dangerous, however, and it creates an environment in which predators commit their awful crimes. It is easy to disguise one's identity on these sites and misrepresent how old you are. Information is not verifiable, and there is of course no chaperone in chat rooms and social media platforms. Predators often lurk in this world, looking for young people who they can entice into sexual activity. They encourage affection with attention and frequent communication. They make promises and use various methods to lure young people into their trust and confidence. They

then exploit that trust and provoke their victims into sexual activity which can be recorded and then distributed literally across the globe.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the increase of the sexual extortion or “sextortion” of minors, which involved blackmailing minors to continue to engage in sexual acts for a predator’s gratification.

The transmission of pornographic images of children is a tremendous problem and continues to grow. There are file sharing web sites and other internet portals through which criminals share these images. They are unfortunately readily available to anyone with a computer, simply by clicking a mouse.

The transmission of child pornography is not a victimless crime. The production of these images damages the children depicted in real and consequential ways. Many of these images depict actual and sometimes sadistic abuse. The production of this filth causes psychological scars on the victims as well. The damage does not stop at the moment the image is recorded. It is rather repeated every time the image is viewed, as victims know that this material is available and used to satisfy the deviant sexual desire of criminals all over the world. The harm to these children is profound and destroys many children’s ability to ever feel safe and secure.

IV. Comprehensive Responses to the Problem of Child Exploitation

So that's the problem – the danger of predators lurking on the internet, exploiting children and transmitting images that never go away. Now I want to talk about what we are doing about that problem – and what everyone watching, reading or listening can do to protect their own children.

A. Enforcement

Law enforcement is aware of the dangerous trends of child enticement and child pornography and is paying attention and reacting to the threat posed by predators on the internet. Investigators monitor chat rooms looking for signs of enticement. They go “undercover,” posing as children and engaging in direct communication with predators. They monitor file sharing sites and attempt to locate child pornography on the internet. They actively monitor this dark corner of the internet and react to those who seek to use it for illegal purposes.

The accessibility of the internet and the technology that makes these crimes possible simultaneously provides law enforcement with a way in which to penetrate this dangerous world. The fact that these crimes are perpetrated on the internet generates records and solid evidence that can be used to prosecute these predators. We have the benefit of documentary evidence to trace patterns of communication. Law enforcement works with internet service providers to

access information stored by those providers and follows trails of enticement and transfers of child pornography. Agents are increasingly creative in using this technology - the same technology that victimizes our children.

The Department of Justice takes the issue of child exploitation extremely seriously and has prioritized it among the various criminal justice challenges we face. One significant manifestation of our commitment to this work is Project Safe Childhood, an initiative begun by the Department of Justice in 2006 to help federal, state and local law enforcement locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the internet.

Since the program began in 2006, the number of federal prosecutions regarding those who exploit children over the internet has climbed each year. Just to give you a frame of reference, in 2006 there were just over 1,600 child exploitation cases filed in federal court. In 2007, only one year after the launch of Project Safe Childhood, that number jumped by over 500 cases to over 2,100. That number increased by another 4% in 2008. This trajectory demonstrates both the scope of the problem of child exploitation and the need for and effectiveness of Project Safe Childhood.

In fiscal year 2012, United States Attorneys' Offices obtained 2,713 indictments against 2,929 defendants, for offenses involving the sexual

exploitation of a minor. This represents a 15 percent increase over fiscal year 2007.

Since 2011, Project Safe Childhood has worked to identify more than 3,500 children depicted in child pornography images and videos through enhanced law enforcement coordination, multi-jurisdictional collaborative efforts and additional contributions by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

B. Prevention

In addition to prosecuting those who exploit children, Project Safe Childhood involves prevention and education. The program provides resources to help children, parents, teachers, coaches, and anyone else who works with children keep them safe on the internet. It provides funding for education and prevention, activities, and helps us share the lessons learned from these awful cases. Education leads to prevention, which is a vital component of the Project Safe Childhood strategy.

We are fortunate in our office to have an expert on child exploitation as our Project Safe Childhood Coordinator. AUSA Nancy Healey is that expert. She prosecuted the Morris case and, working with child exploitation investigators, is responsible for this and other case successes. But she is also working on the prevention front. Nancy is available to talk with parents or students at schools

and other forums on this issue. She gives practical talks to parents and teachers about this threat, and helps people understand and avoid it. I would encourage anyone interested in this sort of educational event – for parents or children – to contact us and arrange to speak with Nancy.

As a final word, I want to talk about the final and most important partner in the battle against child exploitation -- parents. I want to encourage all of the parents who are watching this or may read about this event to take a more active role in supervising their children when they enter this dangerous on-line universe. We encourage parents to get involved in their children's online activities. Monitor what they are doing online. It is no longer sufficient to simply move computers out of the bedrooms and into public places, although that is a critical step. When we give our children smart phones, they can do anything they did on the home computer while outside your home. Talk to your children about online safety. There are many websites devoted to educating parents about online problems and how to best communicate with our children. It is so important to prepare our kids the dangers of the internet and help them recognize and avoid dangerous individuals and situations- and to keep personal information private.

There's an old saying: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." That is particularly true in the area of internet safety. Addressing this threat with

your children may be difficult and unpleasant. It could, however, end up making all the difference in the world.

It's easy to ignore this problem or fail to appreciate its scope. We hope these cases and the information we provided today help parents appreciate the threat and take steps to protect their own families.

Thank you so much for coming today and we will now answer any questions you may have.