



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**COMPUTER CRIMES AND CHILD EXPLOITATION
ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN ASHCROFT VISITS KC
TO ANNOUNCE NEW INITIATIVE TARGETING
INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – U.S. Attorney Todd Graves welcomed U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft to Kansas City today to announce the launch of a new initiative that targets Internet crimes against children, such as child pornography, and other cyber crimes.

“Preventing the exploitation of children, and prosecuting those who use the Internet to prey upon them, is the highest local priority of our office,” Graves said in announcing the creation of the Computer Crimes and Child Exploitation Unit. “We are committed to investing the resources necessary to imprison pedophiles and child pornographers who take advantage of modern advances in computer technology to commit their crimes. They will learn that there is no refuge from justice in cyberspace.”

Ashcroft underscored that priority in his remarks, delivered before a group of students at Briarcliff Elementary School in the North Kansas City School District. Ashcroft met this morning with the FBI’s Cyber Crimes Task Force then visited local students in an elementary classroom prior to the press conference.

Ashcroft’s visit to Kansas City to participate in making today’s announcement reflects the commitment of the Justice Department to support local efforts to combat child exploitation. The United States Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Missouri recently gained additional funding for prosecutors and support staff for the new Computer Crimes and Child Exploitation Unit. The Western District of Missouri is one of only 13 districts in the nation to receive federal funding for such a unit.

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“Our office is not only in the geographic center of the United States,” Graves said, “but also in the center of a wide-ranging variety of cyber crimes originating from or crisscrossing through the Midwest. The nation’s heartland has witnessed an explosion of Internet-fostered or facilitated sex crimes against children.”

The Computer Crimes and Child Exploitation Unit aggressively pursues those who use the Internet to sexually coerce or entice children and those who possess, produce or distribute child pornography. The unit also prosecutes those who cross state lines to sexually abuse women or children; those who abuse women or children on federal lands; and those who sell, buy or transport women and children across state or national boundaries for the purpose of engaging in sexually explicit conduct. The unit also handles computer intrusions (“hacking”), intellectual property offenses and Internet fraud cases.

Graves explained that this new initiative reflects a coordinated strategy to vigorously investigate and prosecute Internet crimes against children and other cyber crimes. “With the commitment of our law enforcement partners and these new resources,” Graves said, “I believe the Kansas City region will become the national model in fighting a growing wave of crimes against children.”

In conjunction with the new unit in the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Graves highlighted several related developments:

* In partnership with state and local law enforcement agencies, the FBI has announced the creation of a regional computer forensics lab. Graves announced today that the Heart of America Regional Computer Forensic Laboratory (one of five in the nation) will be located in the Briarcliff Three office building, at 4150 N. Mulberry in Kansas City-North. The lab will initially consist of 16 computer examiners. Not only will they extract evidence, but the lab will also train law enforcement officers and prosecutors so that they better understand how to seize and present evidence.

* The Kansas City office of the FBI has formed an interagency working group, the Cyber Crimes Task Force, to facilitate discussions regarding crime trends and specific ongoing schemes. The Cyber Crimes Task Force, comprised of law enforcement officials from various federal agencies as well as local agencies in the metropolitan area, will focus on child pornography, Internet fraud and intrusions (“hacking”).

* The Kansas City office of the FBI was selected this summer to be the site of an undercover operation known as Innocent Images, which targets subjects involved in the sexual exploitation of children. There are only 25 such designed FBI sites in the country.

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* The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri also works alongside the US Postal Inspection Service to spearhead the Metro Area Child Exploitation Task Force (MACE), a multi-agency task force. The mission is to network and share intelligence as well as investigative expertise. Representatives from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies regularly attend these meetings.

"These coordinated, concerted efforts represent a united front against child exploitation and cyber crime," Graves said. "To successfully combat Internet crimes against children, a region must have interagency involvement and cooperation. That synergistic effect is precisely what we can accomplish by this strategy, which places our region in the forefront of the nation in this effort to protect our children."

Earlier this year, Graves was appointed co-chair of the U.S. Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Working Group. "I was honored to be selected to serve in that capacity," Graves said. "Investigating and prosecuting Internet crimes against children is my personal top priority."

"Our children will be safer because of these efforts," Graves added. "I applaud all of the agencies that are working together in this endeavor. I also appreciate the support of the Justice Department, as evidenced by Attorney General John Ashcroft's participation in making this announcement today."

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow