

Pushing for Jessica's Law in Utah

On May 22, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman signed the state's most comprehensive laws for sex offender penalties.

These laws were passed in the 2007 General Legislative Session thanks in part to the work of Mark Lunsford and Stop Child Predators, who jointly traveled to Utah to speak with legislators.

Representatives Paul Ray and Carl Wimmer spearheaded the legislation. Joining Lunsford and Stacie Rumenap, SCP's executive director, was Ed Smart, whose daughter Elizabeth Smart was abducted from the Smart home in 2002 and returned safely nine months later.

Lunsford's story "puts tears in your eyes," said Rep. Ray. "But as sad and as heart-wrenching as it is, it helps."

"My daughter can't talk, so I have to speak for her," Lunsford told legislators and the media during a January visit to Salt Lake City. "Too many repeat offenders are allowed back on the streets," he said.

Lunsford believes tighter laws would have saved his daughter's life and has made it his mission to travel the country promoting Jessica's Law. Stop Child Predators joined his fight two years ago. Jessica's Law requires mandatory sentencing standards and electronic monitoring for convicted sex offenders.

Utah's law increases penalties for certain sex offenses against children. It also increases penalties for those who plead guilty to "attempted" offenses. Rape of a child, sodomy on a child, and object rape of a child each carry standard sentences of 25 years to life, and "attempted" charges each carry standard sentences of 15 years to life.

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Newsletter - Summer 2008

ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES**Message from the Executive Director**

While state legislatures wind down for the year, Stop Child Predators is committed to keeping child protection at the forefront of the public agenda. Despite recent progress, child predation remains a terrible problem. One in five girls and one in ten boys are sexually exploited before they reach adulthood. We believe these statistics significantly understate the prevalence of child sex crimes, because many victims do not come forward to file reports.

This past legislative session, Stop Child Predators worked in Colorado, Idaho, Florida, Kentucky, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin to fight back. In Utah, for instance, we teamed with policy experts, law enforcement officers, community leaders, and parents that persuaded lawmakers to adopt Jessica's Law, upping our total number of states to 34. In Vermont, we are being considered for participation in the state's Sexual Violence Prevention Task Force designed to review a comprehensive approach to end sexual violence against women and children in the state.

In our latest effort to combat Internet crimes against children, we led a coalition that submitted comments to the Federal Communications Commission in February. Our comments argued that any new rules governing broadband industry practices should not interfere with the ISPs' ability to make sure their networks are not used to transmit child pornography.

Finally, Stop Child Predators continues its commitment to securing funds for the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006. In May, we joined FUND ADAM, a coalition of child protection advocates and victims' parents that have called on Congress to provide funding for the Adam Walsh Act.

Read about these stories, and more, in the pages that follow. To learn about additional state successes and other insights into Stop Child Predators, please do not hesitate to contact me at srumenap@stopchildpredators.org.

Stacie Rumenap

Stop Child Predators Partners with McGruff on Child Identification Initiative to Protect Children Nationwide

In May, Stop Child Predators partnered with the McGruff Safe Kids Total Identification System program, which tours the United States to fingerprint and photograph children for parents. Having

immediate access to a child's photograph and fingerprints is the single most useful tool for locating a missing child, according to law enforcement officials.

Participating children have their fingerprints and photographs taken digitally, leaving parents with a card that contains all the vital information police would need if the child went missing. Each child also receives a self-collection DNA kit.

"McGruff's Safe Kids program is the most comprehensive child safety program in the United States," said Stacie Rumenap, SCP's Executive Director. "This partnership reassures that Stop Child Predators is on the right path to stopping the sexual exploitation of children."

McGruff Safe Kids Total Identification System is the only digital child identification program licensed by the nonprofit National Crime Prevention Council.

The program is careful to preserve civil liberties. No database is compiled; parents receive the only copy of their child's personal information.

FEDERAL & REGULATORY ACTIVITIES**Congress Criticized for Failure to Fund Adam Walsh Act**

Stop Child Predators joined with FUND ADAM, a coalition of child protection advocates and victims' parents, to call on Congress to provide funding for the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006.

The Adam Walsh Act was signed into law in July 2006. One provision of the Act creates stricter requirements for sex offender registration in order to prevent offenders from slipping through the cracks and hurting our children. Of the more than 550,000 nationally registered sex offenders, the whereabouts of approximately 100,000 are currently unknown.

The Act has gone unfunded, hamstringing the U.S. Marshals Service (USMS), which has been the leader in catching "lost" or unregistered offenders. The USMS has no full-time personnel working sex offender cases. Because no funding for the Act's enforcement was included in the 2008 budget, the USMS is facing a severe reduction in trained agents working to apprehend child predators. It needs an additional \$50 million in funding this year to go after missing offenders, Stop Child Predators argued.

"Almost none of the enforcement programs in the Adam Walsh Act have been funded," Stacie Rumenap, SCP's Executive Director, told the press on May 5. "By not funding the enforcement programs, Congress is putting our nation's children at great risk."

FUND ADAM (www.fundadam.org) was formed in 2007 to bring parents and child protection advocates together to work with policymakers to advocate for funding of the Adam Walsh Child Protection Act. Members include The ALLY Foundation; The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation; The Dru Sjodin Foundation; Ed and Elizabeth Smart; The Fraternal Order of Police; John and Reve Walsh; and The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

FCC Urged to Allow ISPs to Combat Child Pornography

Stop Child Predators led a coalition of child protection groups in filing comments with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in February that urged the agency to oppose restricting the ability of Internet service providers (ISPs) to combat child pornography. Recent testimony by the FCC Chairman indicates that the agency favors the coalition's position.

The growth of the Internet and, most recently, peer-to-peer networks has made child pornography more prevalent and accessible than ever before. The FBI estimates that no fewer than "one in five children will be solicited while online." In a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing last year, the chairman of a popular peer-to-peer application admitted that peer-to-peer networks "are plagued by child pornography." The perceived anonymity afforded by these networks has led some pedophiles to believe they could indulge their perverse fantasies with impunity.

The joint comments – submitted by Stop Child Predators, Enough Is Enough, Christian Coalition of America, and The CP80 Foundation – recommended that any new rules governing broadband industry practices should not interfere with the ability of ISPs to make sure their networks are not used to transmit child pornography and other illegal material. Specifically, if the FCC decides to issue rules, those rules should state explicitly that in the course of managing their networks, ISPs may monitor for the transmission of child pornography, filter sites and files containing such content, and report such content to authorities, the coalition argued.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin appears to agree with the coalition. Martin, testifying before the Senate Commerce Committee on April 22, said no new regulations on network management are currently needed.

The FCC was considering revising its policies after technology companies and ISPs argued over "net neutrality" – the proper balance to strike between consumers' access to the Internet and providers' ability to control a network. The coalition was not invested in the corporate titans' debate; rather, it simply maintained that the FCC should allow ISPs to continue to perform

routine network maintenance that plays a vital role in protecting children from exploitation and online solicitation.

INTERNET SAFETY

Growing Up Online: PBS Addresses Public Misconceptions about Online Safety

Stop Child Predators attended the invitation-only screening of the PBS FRONTLINE documentary *Growing Up Online* on April 7. The Family Online Safety Institute and the National Cable and Telecommunications Association co-hosted the event, which featured questions with the co-producer and director, Rachel Dretzin, and a roundtable on the state of online safety education.

The documentary explores the very public private worlds that kids are creating online, raising important questions about how the Internet is transforming childhood.

According to documentary, fears of online predators have led parents and teachers to focus on keeping kids safe online. But many children think these fears are misplaced. "My parents don't understand that I've spent pretty much since second grade online," one ninth-grader said during an interview on the documentary. "I know what to avoid."

Some Internet experts agree with the kids. "Everyone is panicking about sexual predators online. That's what parents are afraid of; that's what parents are paying attention to," said Parry Aftab, an Internet security expert and executive director of WiredSafety.org. But Aftab said the real concern is the trouble that kids may get into on their own, separate from the issue of sexual predators reaching out to children online. "Through social networking and other Web sites, kids with eating disorders share tips about staying thin, and depressed kids can share information about the best ways to commit suicide," Aftab told FRONTLINE.

David Finkelhor, Ph.D. and Director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center housed at the University of New Hampshire, noted that a national survey of youth conducted in 2000 "found that about one in five of the kids had experienced unwanted sexual solicitation when they were online ... over the course of the year." Fortunately, a repeat of the study in 2005 brought a "positive development:" unwanted sexual solicitation "had been reduced to only one in seven of the kids."

"When I talk these days, I like to emphasize the statistic of one in 20 of youth encountering what we call an 'aggressive sexual solicitation'—that is, one that really threatened to go offline, where somebody made an effort to contact them or meet them—and those seem to me to be the more serious of the group," added Dr. Finkelhor.

The documentary's producers discussed the making of their documentary and what they learned about—and from—the Internet generation. Some of the answers may surprise you. Agree or disagree? Write us at info@stopchildpredators.org regarding the producer's findings.

FRONTLINE: As you said, that earlier report touched on the online predator issue, and yet this report seems to conclude that cyberbullying is perhaps the more prevalent danger. Were you expecting predators to be a bigger concern when you started researching this report?

Dretzin: Absolutely. Like many parents, I believed my primary responsibility when it came to Internet safety was to tell my children never, ever to give out their real name or address to anyone online. If they didn't do that, I surmised, I could relax. I assumed that the biggest danger to my kids—to all kids—was the threat of online predators.

One of the biggest surprises in making this film was the discovery that the threat of online predators is misunderstood and overblown. The data shows that giving out personal information over the Internet makes absolutely no difference when it comes to a child's vulnerability to predation. Also, the vast majority of kids who do end up having contact with a stranger they meet over the Internet are seeking out that contact, at least at first.

Most importantly, all the kids we met, without exception, told us the same thing: They would never dream of meeting someone in person they'd met online. As a matter of fact, we had trouble making contact with kids online during our research. Most kids we approached were suspicious and loath to respond to requests for an interview over the phone. We tried everything—links to our Web site, offers to send copies of films we had made—but kids are conditioned not to talk to strangers online. It was oddly reassuring.

Now, when I think about my three children going online, I think much more about how the virtual world will affect their social and emotional lives. I think about them saying something online they later regret or being hurt by something someone else says. I worry about them seeing something—a piece of video, a photograph—that they may be too young to see, and I worry about them becoming too accustomed to clicking a button and getting an instant answer. These are things I never gave much thought to before, but having reported this story, I feel more armed for the real problems they may face and more realistic about the threat of predators.

Growing Up Online originally aired on January 22, 2008, on PBS. More information about the documentary and the full interview with Producer Rachel Dretzin and others may be found at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kidsonline/etc/notebook.html>

IN THE STATES

Screening of Volunteers Found Inadequate

Volunteer organizations dangerously neglect to screen new members for criminal backgrounds, finds a new study conducted by the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) and a new audit conducted by ChoicePoint.

One in three nonprofit organizations perform no background checks on volunteers, the NCVC reported. Of those that do perform checks,

two-thirds do not check fingerprint databases, the most reliable form of criminal background check. Twelve percent do not screen volunteers in any way — forgoing even an interview.

ChoicePoint's audit reveals the dangers of inadequate screening. Examining 3.7 million background screenings performed from 2002 to 2007, the audit found that more than 189,000 individuals who tried to work for nonprofits — approximately 5 percent of applicants — had at least one criminal conviction. More than 2,700 were registered sex offenders. Every 11.5 hours, then, a registered sex offender tried to gain a position at a nonprofit.

The most vulnerable populations of Americans, including at-risk children, depend on nonprofit organizations. In 2006 more than one-quarter of all Americans, or 61 million persons, served as volunteers.

Stop Child Predators attended the unveiling of the NCVC study on April 22 and strongly supports comprehensive background screenings of volunteers who work with children. Such screenings keep Americans safe and protect nonprofits from legal liability and reputational harm. ChoicePoint's VolunteerSelect background screening is a model program, searching criminal records from all 50 states.

Life in Prison for Repeat Child Molesters

Stop Child Predators joined Florida Rep. Dick Kravitz and Sen. Paula Dockey in Tallahassee to shepherd passage of a bill ordering a life prison sentence for anyone convicted a second time of molesting a child.

"You will not damage another child, you will not leave another victim and another desperate family in your wake," said Kravitz during a May 1 news conference.

House Bill 85 and its companion, Senate Bill 496, require a mandatory life prison sentence for anyone found guilty of a second conviction for lewd or lascivious molestation on a child under the age of 12. Governor Charlie Crist is expected to sign the bill.

Supporters said that although the number of twice-convicted molesters is small, such molesters would pose a great risk to children. Convicted sex offenders are four times more likely than other criminals to be rearrested for a sex crime, according to a 2003 study by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics. Moreover, of the released sex offenders who committed another sex crime, 40 percent perpetrated the new offense within a year or less from their prison discharge. Most of the children they molested after leaving prison were 13 years old or younger, the study found.

"The most important solution to keeping sex offenders off the streets is mandatory sentencing," said Stacie Rumenap, SCP's Executive Director. "Mandatory sentencing is important because it prevents crime. Kept away from the general population, repeat sex offenders cannot commit a sex offense again."