

Home » Briefing Room » Justice News

JUSTICE NEWS

Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole Speaks at the National Law Enforcement Training on Child Exploitation

Atlanta~Tuesday, April 17, 2012

Thank you, Sally, for your kind introduction. I'd also like to thank both you and Director Keenan for the warm welcome to Georgia.

I am honored to address so many law enforcement professionals from across the country who are devoted to protecting our children from the scourge of sexual exploitation, and I am particularly pleased to be doing so during National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Just as each of you has made fighting child exploitation a priority, so too has the Department of Justice, and we are continuing to intensify our efforts to eradicate all aspects of child exploitation. But most importantly, we recognize that the Department's work is just one contribution among many. It takes law enforcement partners across all levels of government – colleagues in other federal agencies, as well as state, local, and tribal partners, many of whom participate in the ICAC task force program – and our many non-governmental organizational partners to make this effort successful.

In order to maximize the impact our efforts have on child sexual exploitation crimes, it is absolutely essential that we all continue to improve the way we work together to investigate these crimes, prosecute the offenders, and help the victims recover from the terrible harms they have suffered. No one agency can tackle the challenges of these cases alone – it is therefore essential that all of us who work to protect children deepen our collaboration and partnership so that we can bring all available resources and expertise to the fight. Indeed, our National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction recognizes the vital importance of working together with our partners across the United States and around the world to aggressively pursue those who would steal our children's innocence.

This outstanding training event – which is bringing together over 1,700 agents, investigators, prosecutors, victim advocates, and community outreach specialists from around the country, and from all sectors of government – is an excellent lesson in the benefits of increased collaboration and partnership. For example, federal agents will be learning cutting-edge investigative techniques together with their state, local, and tribal partners in the ICAC task force program. This will not only result in both federal and ICAC investigators improving their capacity to investigate these crimes, but, and this is just as important, they will be interacting with and getting to know their colleagues from all parts of government, and through that forming relationships and benefitting from each other's perspectives and experiences. In short, participating in training together will not only help improve your skills, but it will also help improve how we all work together to investigate cases.

This training event is also critically important because, as you all know, technology continues to change and offenders continue to find new ways to exploit our children. Offenders' increased use of sophisticated technologies to avoid detection poses new challenges for all of us. And offenders' participation in online communities devoted to the sexual exploitation of children is on the rise. This is particularly troubling, because in these communities offenders encourage each other to produce child pornography and then distribute the images they produced to all members of the group. In order to be able to continue to effectively protect our children from these crimes, we must ensure that our nation's law enforcement professionals are able to keep pace with these kinds of changes. This training event will help ensure that you have the skills you need to make that happen, whether you are a law enforcement investigator, digital evidence examiner, prosecutor, victim advocate, or community outreach specialist.

Even as we recognize we have much more to do if we are to keep all of our children safe, it is appropriate to also take account of how far we have come in protecting our children. From the Department of Justice's perspective, our efforts have dramatically increased over the last several years. For example, the Department launched Project Safe Childhood (PSC) in 2006 to combat the proliferation of technology-facilitated crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. The Department expanded PSC in May of 2011 to encompass all federal crimes involving the sexual exploitation of a minor, including domestic prostitution of children, international travel for sex with children, child sexual exploitation in Indian country, and failure to register as a sex offender. In each federal district around the country, PSC coordinates efforts to protect our children by the development of a

network of federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of offenders involved in the sexual exploitation of minors.

Under PSC, the number of federal prosecutions involving child sexual exploitation has increased significantly. In fiscal year 2011, federal prosecutors obtained over 2,700 indictments for offenses involving the sexual exploitation of a minor. This represents a 42 percent increase in the number of indictments over fiscal year 2006, in which we filed 1,901 indictments. Since the beginning of fiscal year 2007, more than 11,447 defendants have been convicted in federal courts of offenses related to the sexual exploitation of a minor. Since PSC began, federal prosecutors have obtained life sentences in 64 PSC cases. Most importantly, from the launch of PSC through January 2012, approximately 3,500 children depicted in child pornography images have been identified through enhanced law enforcement coordination, multi-jurisdictional collaborative efforts, and additional contributions by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Many of these children have been removed from abusive environments and have received the help they needed in repairing their shattered lives.

During this week's training, you'll have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of your colleagues in developing successful multi-jurisdictional investigations that fully leverage the expertise and skills of several investigative agencies. In this afternoon's plenary session, you'll learn about Operation Minotaur, a case that began with a single report to NCMEC's CyberTipline and through the efforts of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Homeland Security Investigations, the FBI, the Orange County California Sheriff's Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California and other state and local ICAC and ICAC-affiliated agencies, resulted in dismantling a network of offenders dedicated to sexually abusing children and trafficking in child pornography. You also will have the opportunity later this afternoon to learn about Operation Delego, in which the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section within the Department's Criminal Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana worked together with Homeland Security Investigations and numerous law enforcement agencies around the country and around the world to dismantle an international criminal network organized to sexually exploit children. These and other case studies you will hear about throughout the training will drive home the same message – that only by working seamlessly together can we maximize our efforts to protect children from exploitation.

The work you all do, day in and day out, is difficult and it is dangerous. The things you see and confront on a daily basis, take an extreme toll on you. You must be aware of it, realize the harm it can do to you, and make sure you take care of each other's mental health as you do this job. But all the while, we all must keep in mind how critically important this work is. It is critically important to the victims who we hope to save and help repair their shattered lives. It is critically important to the family and friends of the children who have been victimized. It is critically important to the children who we protect from ever having this happen to them by stopping these monsters before they can harm others. And it is critically important to the very fabric of our country. It says a great deal about a nation's character when we hold up the protection of the most vulnerable among us as one of our highest priorities.

Your work is absolutely essential to achieving all of these goals and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your willingness to face these challenges. Every day you work to hold offenders accountable, and to identify and help victims, is a day that gets us closer to our goal – a world in which every child can grow up without being exploited.

Thank you for standing up to protect our children.