

Improving Internet Safety -- October 2007

One of the first things we teach children is, "Don't talk to strangers." While this helps protect our children when they are in public, it is becoming an increasing challenge to keep children safe from online predators. This week, the United States Department of Justice awarded a \$250,000 grant to the Delaware Department of Justice in Wilmington to assist in the development of the technology necessary to respond to internet crimes against children. Preventing internet crimes against children must be addressed from several angles, and this grant can help us detect and track perpetrators. In addition to apprehending predators, we have to teach children how to utilize the internet, without becoming prey to its dangers.

In Congress, I support the Internet Safety Education Act. This bill would sustain several internet safety programs, such as i-SAFE, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Netsmartz, Web Wise Kids, Teenangels, and The Internet Keep Safe Coalition (IKeepSafe). These programs provide our schools and law enforcement agents with tools to teach our children how to protect themselves from the 750,000 predators they may encounter each time they go online. In fact, one in five children received an online sexual solicitation last year alone. These frightening statistics illuminate the importance of internet awareness.

Predators utilize chat rooms and internet social networks to learn personal details about our youth as leverage for solicitation. Legislation to protect children in this circumstance is the Deleting Online Predators Act. This bill would require schools and libraries enforce internet safety policies to keep kids out of harms way when surfing the internet. Such policies may include prohibiting the use of chat rooms and social networking websites -- unless they are used for educational purposes or used while under adult supervision. School administrators may also disable such websites in school. This bill would also have the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issue a consumer alert and establish a website to provide parents and teachers with information about the dangers of child predators on the internet.

It is clear to me that the prevalence of online predators is a frightening reality. Teachers and parents, administrators, and law makers should continue to work together to ensure that children in Delaware and all across our nation remain safe from the dangers of the internet. The internet can be a wonderful educational resource, but it is essential that we are aware of the potential dangers going online can pose for kids.