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NEWS RELEASE

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East Metro leaders hold seminar on protecting metro youth online

Law enforcement, prosecutors, community and families all share prevention responsibilities

Stillwater – The East Metro Crime Prevention coalition presented a comprehensive seminar this morning on how predators use social media to reach children in our community, how law enforcement is adapting to the challenges and what parents, kids and the community can do to protect themselves. The seminar, tailored to law enforcement, prosecutors, victim advocates, school counselors, faith leaders and juvenile justice system professionals, featured presentations from the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) -- Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force ([ICAC](#)), Hazelden Betty Ford and the Wetterling Resource Center.

“Predators prey on the trust that our kids share online in what is otherwise a positive place to exchange personal information,” said Washington County Attorney Pete Orput. “These criminals too often exploit this trust for their own personal gain.”

Special Agent Donny Chueng discussed the ICAC’s six-prong approach to recognizing and investigating internet crimes against children, including partnerships with local law enforcement agencies. He also stressed the need for everyone – from law enforcement to the community at large – to educate themselves on the basics of these types of crimes. The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation’s Jessica Wong highlighted the proliferation of mobile device apps and websites that most entice young people and their effect on brain development, including chemical abuse and mental health issues. Alison Feigh, program manager for the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center focused her remarks on why are teens targeted online, what offenders are looking for, and what professionals can do about it. The seminar concluded with case studies from each county. Prevention resources were also made available from these organizations and the FBI.

“Being a parent in today’s constantly changing online world can be a daunting event for the even the most vigilant,” said Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom. “While law enforcement never rests in fighting this growing threat in our community, the first and best line of defense of our children is a parent who is curious, caring and sometimes even nosy about where their kids are ‘going’ online.”

Led by Washington County Attorney Pete Orput, Dakota County Attorney James Backstrom, Ramsey County Attorney John Choi, along with Washington County Sheriff William Hutton, Dakota County Sheriff Tim Leslie and Ramsey County Sheriff Matt Bostrom, the coalition serves to unify educational resources, prevention strategies and law enforcement response to address the problems that plague our communities and engage the greater community in dialogue and partnership on those issues. The Coalition shares information throughout the year as members gather resources and best practices to solve some of the most pressing crimes in our communities.



Select quotes from the internet safety forum:

“There is no sheriff patrolling the World Wide Web. This is what it is incumbent on each of us – whether we are law enforcement, prosecutors, teachers, parents and even kids – to be vigilant in preventing online predators from harming those we love.”

- Dakota County Sheriff Tim Leslie

“The teen brain has the engine of a race car and the brakes of a bicycle. The pre-frontal cortex of a young person’s brain does not completely develop until 25 years of age which effects everything from short & long-term planning to impulse control.”

- Jessica Wong, Hazelden Betty Ford (*Warp Speed: Working with Teens in a Digital Age*)

“Every kid should have at least five healthy adults in their life to forma safety net. Offenders are very good at looking for kids without a safety net.”

- Alison Feigh, Jacob Wetterling Resource Center & National Child Protection Training Center (*Navigating the Virtual Playground Safely*)