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ASSEMBLY PANEL CLEARS 10-BILL PACKAGE TO IMPROVE INTERNET SAFETY

*Comprehensive Package Stems from Attorney General Milgram's Initiatives;
Would Enhance Penalties and Laws to Protect Children on the Internet*

(TRENTON) – The Assembly Judiciary Committee unanimously released a sweeping 10-bill package. Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein and 13 other Assembly Democratic lawmakers sponsored that would give law enforcement enhanced abilities to crackdown on child Internet crimes.

The 10-bill package, among other things, would upgrade penalties and crimes for offenders who communicate in a harassing, sexually offensive or abusive manner with minors on Web sites and through electronic communication.

The bills are part of Attorney General Anne Milgram's Internet safety initiatives.

"This 10-bill package would give law enforcement the tools they need to better protect children who use the Internet for education and recreation," said Greenstein (D-Middlesex/Mercer), who is sponsoring each bill. "No longer will Web sites be the playgrounds of criminals looking to prey on vulnerable children."

"My office combats Internet threats by employing an aggressive, multi-pronged approach ranging from criminal and civil investigations to cooperative efforts with networking sites and service providers to education initiatives aimed at teachers, school administrators, parents and students," Milgram said. "But as we pursued our initiatives, it became clear that it was essential that our criminal and civil enforcement statutes address evolving threats posed by bad actors online. This comprehensive Internet safety legislative package addresses those issues."

Also sponsoring the legislation are Assembly members Wayne P. DeAngelo, Nelson T. Albano, Gary S. Schaer, Matthew W. Milam, Frederick Scalera, John J. Burzichelli, Peter J. Barnes III, Eleese Evans, Valerie Vainieri Huttler, Patrick J. Diegnan Jr., Pamela R. Lampitt, Gordon M. Johnson and Douglas H. Fisher.

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“It’s a parent’s worst nightmare to realize their child’s safety has been jeopardized simply by using a computer,” said DeAngelo (D-Mercer/Middlesex). “It’s time New Jersey upgrades its crimes and penalties to assist law enforcement in preventing, investigating and cracking down on cyberspace crimes and abuses that threaten the welfare of our children.”

The 10-bill package is comprised of legislation that would:

- Amend the state’s luring and enticing and endangering the welfare of minors laws to, among other things, expand the definition of “electronic means” to include not only the Internet but also any electronic communication device. (A-3754 – Greenstein/Milam/Barnes/DeAngelo)
- Make it a crime to communicate or transmit sexually suggestive communications to a minor. (A-3755 – Milam/Greenstein/Schaer/DeAngelo)
- Upgrade certain sex crimes against minors. (A-3756 – Greenstein/Albano/DeAngelo/Vainieri Huttle)
- Provide penalties for sexually offensive or abusive communication through social networking Web sites. (A-3757 – Albano/Vainieri Huttle/DeAngelo/Greenstein)
- Require persons subject to Megan’s Law registration to provide law enforcement with any Internet user names. (A-3758 – Greenstein/Diegnan/Barnes/Schaer)
- Upgrade offense of harassment involving the Internet and minors. (A-3759 – Evans/Lampitt/Scalera/Greenstein)
- Authorize wiretap orders for the investigation of luring or enticing a child, identity theft, stalking and harassment under certain circumstances. (A-3760 – Schaer/Johnson/Albano/Greenstein)
- Authorize the interception of wire or electronic communications of a suspected computer trespasser under certain circumstances. (A-3761 – Scalera/Fisher/Milam/Greenstein)
- Require information technology professionals who find child pornography on computers to report the finding to law enforcement. (A-3762 – DeAngelo/Burzichelli/Schaer/Greenstein)
- Create a “Computer Crime Prevention Fund” by imposing a penalty for certain crimes and offenders. (A-3763 – Barnes/Albano/Evans/Greenstein).

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“Law enforcement needs the tools to keep pace with today’s ever-changing technology and ward off predators who lurk behind a computer screen in hopes of preying on children,” said Albano (D-Atlantic/Cape May/Cumberland). “This is a common-sense step forward to help give parents peace of mind that we’re doing all we can to protect their children in this technological age.”

“Every parent worries when their child logs onto a computer and enters that new world that has evolved on the Internet,” said Milam (D-Atlantic/Cape May/Cumberland). “It can be a wonderful tool for education and keeping in touch with friends and loved ones, but it can also be a dangerous place. These bills aim to give authorities what they need to keep pace with the criminals.”

Other sponsors released the following statements:

Assemblyman Gary Schaer (D- Passaic/Bergen/Essex):

“Law enforcement needs every available tool at its disposal to ensure the safety of our children when they venture online. This comprehensive package will provide police with the ability to go after online predators before they even have a chance to victimize a child.”

Assemblyman Fred Scalera (D-Essex/Bergen/Passaic):

“Online stalkers who target children cannot be treated lightly. We need to be able to go after these individuals swiftly and bring the full force of the law to bear.”

Assemblyman John J. Burzichelli (D-Gloucester/Cumberland/Salem):

“Many times we owe prosecutions to average citizens who come across wrongdoing and do the right thing, so we know many people, including information technology professionals, are already willing to help. The proposal to require information technology professionals to report inappropriate child images – or suspicion about such an image - to the proper authorities is just a step toward ensuring everyone does the right thing.”

Assemblyman Peter J. Barnes III (D-Middlesex):

“Fining offenders and using the money to establish a Computer Crime Prevention Fund is a smart way to boost funding and ease the taxpayer burden that comes with investigating and prosecuting computer-related crime and publicizing programs to enhance public awareness of computer-related crime. Penalizing the people who force us to investigate these nightmarish crimes is sensible public policy that puts the burden on offenders, not taxpayers.”

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Assemblywoman Eleese Evans (D-Passaic):

“Times and technology have changed and so must our harassment laws. Using the Internet or e-mail to subject another person to hatred, contempt or ridicule is just as much harassment as it would be to do it openly to someone on the street. We cannot tolerate it in either form, but the Internet and its accessibility and ability to quickly spread harassing information makes this bill vital.”

Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen):

“Pedophiles who target children through their computers need to know that when they are caught - and they will be – that they are going to face stiff penalties and jail time.”

Assembly Patrick Diegnan (D-Middlesex):

“In this day and age anyone can go on the Internet and disguise themselves behind an anonymous user name. That includes sex offenders who would otherwise be subject to community notification laws. Such offenders shouldn’t be able to hide their identify and escape notice simply because they’re logged onto the Internet. They’re no less a threat just because they’re sitting at a keyboard.”

Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt (D-Camden):

“Just because someone is using the Internet or e-mail to harass someone doesn’t make it any less of a concern. Our laws need to match the times, and that’s what this legislation will do.”

Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (D-Bergen):

“The efforts of police to get suspected cyber-criminals off-line cannot be stymied by bureaucracy. This legislative package will ensure that law enforcement has the ability to act quickly at the first sign of trouble.”

Assemblyman Douglas H. Fisher (D-Cumberland/Gloucester/Salem):

“Children are the most vulnerable members of our society. As children embark into a whole new world through the Internet we must ensure that they are thoroughly protected. We wouldn’t send our kids outside unsupervised or unprotected so we cannot allow them to jump on the information highway without adequate protection from potential harm.”

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