

Joint Statement

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KANE STATE'S ATTORNEY, SHERIFF ANNOUNCE INITIATIVE TO COMBAT CHILD EXPLOITATION

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Kane County State's Attorney Jamie L. Mosser and Sheriff Ron Hain announce a joint initiative to combat the growing proliferation of child pornography and the online sexual exploitation of children.

The new Child Exploitation Unit actually began investigating cases in August 2022 with the addition of its first specialized investigator. It added a second investigator in March 2023, and most recently added a computer forensics expert to more quickly analyze electronic devices for evidence of the crimes being committed.

The goal is to ensure that individuals who download, possess, view and share child pornography are held accountable for their criminal conduct.

In addition to child pornography, the unit tackles so-called "sextortion" cases. This is when an adult posing as teenager befriends teenagers through social media, coerces the teenager to take compromising photos of themselves and eventually threatens to share the images unless the teenager continues to share compromising photos.

SA Mosser and Sheriff Hain deemed the unit to be an urgent need upon learning that most of the tips being forwarded to Kane County police agencies were not being investigated because of a lack of resources at most agencies.

SA Mosser first hired Investigator Drew Uhler, who has extensive experience in investigating internet crimes from his 17 years at the Wheaton Police Department. The office next added Investigator Kevin Reynolds, who gained his experience in investigating internet crimes during

his 10 years with the Ottawa, Ill., Police Department. Most recently the office added computer forensics expert Zeus Flores, who worked in computer forensics the last 12 years with the Illinois Attorney General's Office. The funding for this was approved by the Kane County Board, which recognized the need for this unit.

Sheriff Hain also has dedicated experienced investigators from his office to this unit to aid in the investigations. The unit is primarily housed at the Sheriff's Office. Additionally, St. Charles Police Chief James Keegan agreed to allow the unit to use his department's cyber lab for these investigations. The State's Attorney's Office and Sheriff's Office will help to outfit the cyber lab with additional technology so investigations can be completed more efficiently.

Assistant State's Attorney Matt Rodgers supervises the unit at the State's Attorney's Office. He, along with two other prosecutors, are tasked with these matters. ASA Bob Dore, chief of the office's Criminal Division, has 15 years of experience prosecuting child exploitation cases and lends his expertise to the unit.

Detailing the need

The proliferation of child pornography and online child exploitation grows more problematic every year. According to the most recent data available from the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, there were nearly 30 million reports of online child sexual exploitation in 2021 in the United States. This is an increase of more than 42 percent from 2019. Federal, state and local law enforcement simply are unable to keep up.

- The 30 million reports in 2021 translates to more than 563,000 reports per week.
- These reports involved 39.9 million images, of which 16.9 million were unique, and 44.8 million videos, of which 5.1 million were unique
- In 2021, NCMEC alerted local law enforcement across the U.S. to more than 4,260 potential new child victims of child pornography.
- According to the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, 78 percent of images it assessed depicted children younger than 12. Of those images, 63 percent of the children were younger than 8.

According to the Illinois Attorney General's Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force and High-Tech Crimes Bureau:

- NCMEC forwarded 4,190 tips to the Illinois AG's ICAC Task Force for investigation by Illinois law enforcement in 2019.
- That number grew to 9,292 tips in 2022, a total of 26,748 over the last four years.
- There were 3,310 tips from NCMEC to the task force through March 31, 2023. That's on pace to more than triple the number of tips received in 2019.

Since August 2022, the Kane County Child Exploitation Unit has:

- Investigated 187 NCMEC tips
- Created 55 criminal case investigations
- Served 91 search warrants
- Served 16 residential search warrants requiring the digital forensic analysis of about 100 devices (mobile phones, computers, external hard drives)
- Referred three cases to agencies outside of Kane County

- Arrested nine adult offenders and charged them with felony offenses related to the manufacture, dissemination and possession of child pornography, and unauthorized video recording
- Identified approximately 40 minor victims

State’s Attorney Mosser said:

“Crimes related to manufacturing, disseminating and possessing child pornography are more pervasive in our community than most people know. These crimes are not victimless. Every time someone views a lewd image or video of a child, that child is victimized. I’m beyond grateful for the work that went into the creation of this unit and for the work being done every day to stop these individuals from continuing their criminal behavior. We are announcing this initiative now as it is Child Abuse Prevention Month. This month is a reminder that we need to do everything possible to protect the most vulnerable in our community. Every image or video of child pornography is a depiction of child abuse. My thanks to Sheriff Hain and his team for partnering with my office to create this Child Exploitation Unit, and to all of the investigators, analysts and prosecutors who will hold these individuals accountable. My thanks to Chief Keegan and the St. Charles Police Department for joining us in this collaboration with the use of their cyber lab and other resources. Finally, my thanks to Attorney General Kwame Raoul and his team, along with the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, the High-Tech Crimes Bureau for their continued partnership in collaboratively investigating and prosecuting these cases so we can truly protect our children, the U.S. Department of Justice, and Homeland Security Investigations.”

Sheriff Hain said:

“I worked for nearly four years to promote these types of investigations. However, because of manpower issues and other priorities, these extremely important investigations received divided attention over that time. Thanks to the great partnership the Sheriff’s Office has with State’s Attorney Mosser, we have been able to establish a joint task force to fully implement this initiative. We now house an SAO investigator at the Sheriff’s Office and the two current SAO investigators are fully supported and assisted by Sheriff’s detectives. This model has proved effective in eradicating our community of these most egregious offenders.”

For more data:

<https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/cybertipline/cybertiplinedata>

<https://www.thorn.org/child-pornography-and-abuse-statistics/>

<https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/2699673/Cybertip-ca-CSAResearchReport-2016-En.pdf>