

A Plan to Crack Down on Internet Predators

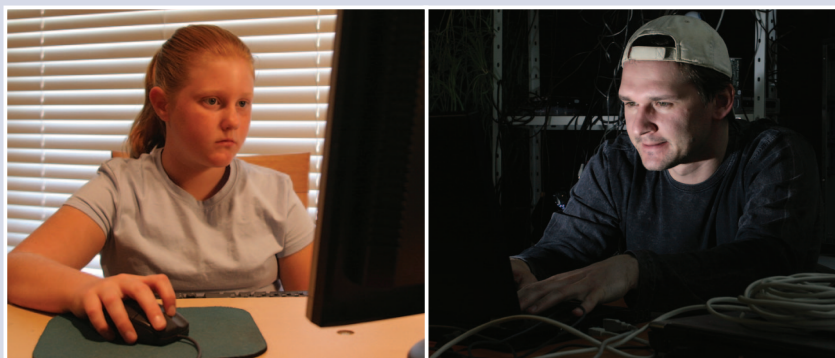


Our Children's Safety is at Risk

In recent years, the number of individuals soliciting children and trading child pornography in Virginia has grown at a staggering rate. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice reports that as of 2008, there were over 20,000 unique computers being used to view and traffic hardcore child pornography in Virginia – and that's on only one of 15 child pornography trafficking networks on the Internet.¹ Ever-changing technology can help Virginia law enforcement and prosecutors locate these twisted individuals – but they need resources and more partners in order to track them down.

FACT: There are over 20,000 computers being used to view and traffic hardcore child pornography in Virginia.

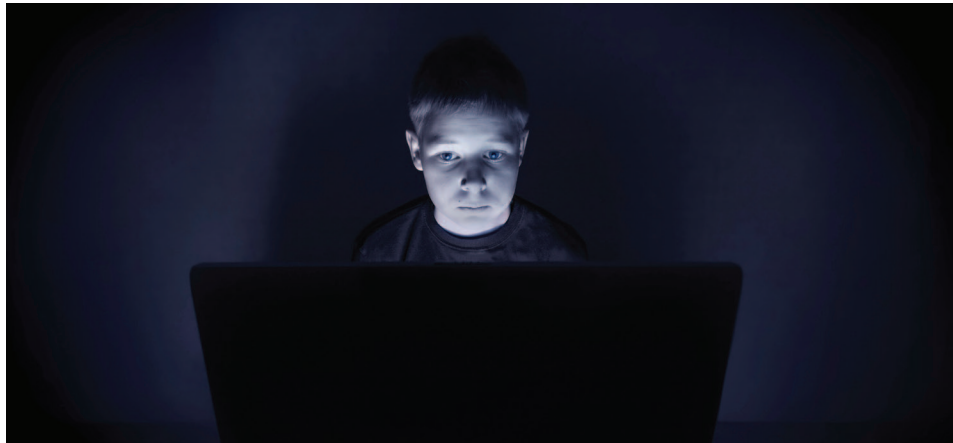
Child pornography is a fast-growing business – and as the quantity of material online grows, the content is becoming increasingly depraved. The Internet Watch Foundation's 2006 annual report indicated 10,656 known child abuse domains compared with 3,433 in 2004.²



- *1 in 7 children is sexually solicited online.*
- *34 percent of children saw sexual material online they did not want to see.*
- *1 in 11 children reported being harassed online.*
- *1 in 25 children received an aggressive sexual solicitation. The solicitor asked to meet them somewhere; called them on the telephone; or sent them regular mail, money, or gifts.*
- *More than one-third of all youth reported talking online to persons they knew only online.*
- *Only one-quarter of the youth who encountered a sexual solicitation or approach told a parent.³*

Additionally, over the past few years, more teenagers have been using the Internet. According to a recent survey, 93 percent of all Americans between the ages of 12 and 17 use the Internet – compared with 87 percent in 2004 and 73 percent in 2000.⁴ In 2006, 61 percent of 13-17 year olds had established profiles on social networking websites – now, 71 percent of teens report having online profiles.⁵ Teenagers who use the Internet will also post personal information on the Internet – 64 percent say they have posted pictures or videos of themselves and 58 percent put information online about where they live.⁶

FACT: 93% of 12-17 year-olds use the Internet



FACT: 58% of teens put information online about where they live

While the data speaks for itself, we need to realize that there are stories behind every statistic. Stories of young girls who are seduced, abducted, and abused by adult men. Stories about pedophiles circulating images of adults engaging in sexual intercourse with toddlers. This problem is serious, and it impacts children.

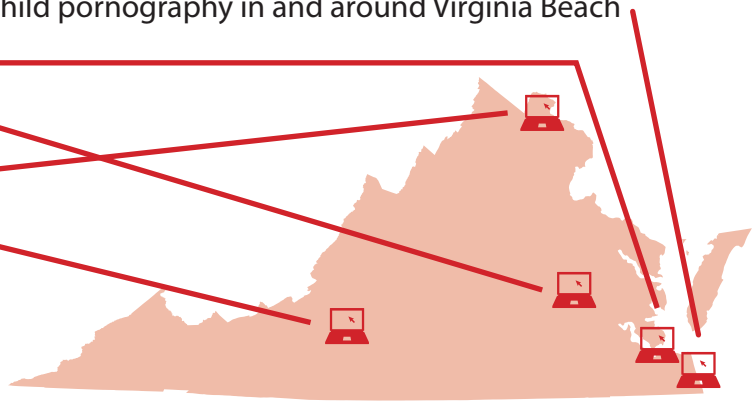
Thanks to the hard work of dedicated advocates and scientific advances, we now have the technology to locate people committing these heinous crimes. Technology exists that can pinpoint the location of individuals who are soliciting children online and who are trafficking child pornography. For example, the Wyoming Bureau of Criminal Investigation's Operation Fairplay is used in Internet Crimes Against Children taskforces around the country – including in Virginia. This technology can locate unique serial numbers of computers that are trafficking hardcore child pornography through certain peer-to-peer networks.

Sergeant Flint Waters of the Wyoming State Division of Criminal Investigation developed this software and his operation has run analyses of the number of computers distributing these horrific images and videos in specific areas. In fact, thanks to this technology, we know, for example, that between 2005 and 2008, there were approximately:

- 1,956 computers trading hardcore child pornography in and around Virginia Beach
- 1,367 in and around Norfolk
- 1,246 in and around Richmond
- 657 in and around Alexandria
- 406 in and around Roanoke

And the list goes on.⁷

Unfortunately, Virginia law enforcement does not have the resources it would require to take action against these Internet predators. Virginia has two Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces assigned to combat these crimes, but they are severely understaffed and underfunded. The ICAC Task Forces partner with other localities to track down predators, and yet many Virginia localities do not have law enforcement personnel, investigators, or staff solely dedicated to this issue.



The small number of personnel dedicated to these issues is incapable of responding to the staggering number of these cases in Virginia. Too often, we have to rely on being reactive – responding to tips that come in about possible offenders.

Steve Shannon believes we need to take a proactive approach by using the latest technology to detect, locate *and go after* individuals who are trafficking illegal child pornography. Steve believes we have to stop these twisted individuals before they have a chance to victimize more Virginia children.



FACT: 40-50% of the world's Internet traffic flows through data centers located in Northern Virginia

In Virginia, we have a unique responsibility to crack down on Internet predators: 40-50 percent of the world's Internet traffic flows through data centers located in Northern Virginia.⁸ We must send a message to pedophiles: if you stalk or abuse a child in Virginia, you will go to jail. The bottom line is that in Virginia today there are thousands of predators soliciting children or trafficking child pornography. Law enforcement lacks the resources to go after these individuals. If he is elected, Steve Shannon will work to make sure police and prosecutors have everything they need to keep our kids safe and bring these predators to justice.

Shannon's Record of Protecting Children



Steve Shannon has a long history of standing up for innocent children.

His career in public safety began when Steve's wife, Abby, told him about a program in Texas called "AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert" - a child safety initiative that brings law enforcement and local media together to notify the public and try to recover abducted children. Steve and Abby decided Virginia needed a version of the program and spent roughly 18 months working with a network of law enforcement, community leaders and representatives

of the broadcast media to bring the AMBER Alert program to the Commonwealth. It was clear to them that the police needed this vital tool to help them find children in those first crucial three hours after they go missing.

As a prosecutor, Steve fought for many innocent children. In one case in particular, Steve was prosecuting a man who was charged with molesting a young girl several times. With the permission of her guardian, he put her on the stand. When she saw her abuser, the girl froze and began to visibly shake. Steve asked for and received permission from the judge to stand between her and the accused to block his view of her, and it was granted. Steve realized at that moment that this is what being committed to public safety is about. It is why he became a prosecutor - to stand between the criminals and the public who were relying on him to protect them.

It is with this background and commitment that Steve entered the General Assembly, where he continued to fight for the rights of innocent children. During his time in the House of Delegates, Steve wrote legislation to help law enforcement use school records to track and locate abducted children - a law that has become a national model for child safety legislation. He wrote legislation that strengthens protective orders against stalkers. He also passed legislation that expands Virginia's Rape Shield Statute to protect children who testify against sexual predators. Steve Shannon is committed to bringing this strong belief - that the role of law enforcement is to protect innocent people against criminals - to the office of Attorney General.

Shannon's Plan to Crack Down on Internet Predators

- 1** Under sections 18.2-152.1-152.16 of the *Code of Virginia*, the Attorney General of Virginia has the statutory authority to investigate and prosecute Internet crimes against children – including child pornography and exploitation.

Steve Shannon will take a proactive approach to this responsibility. He will:

- **Increase staff capacity in the Attorney General's Computer Crimes Unit.** Steve Shannon will elevate the status of this issue by dedicating more staff in his office to deal with Internet crimes against children. This will be a top priority for the Attorney General's office.
- **Personally take pedophiles to court.** Steve is a former prosecutor who knows how important it is to be on the front lines protecting children. He will work with the federal government and state and local law enforcement to make sure these criminals are caught and punished. He is prepared to personally go to court to prosecute these crimes, in order to raise awareness of this issue as the public safety crisis.



"We must send a message to pedophiles: if you stalk or abuse a child in Virginia, you will go to jail."

–Steve Shannon

2

In order to bring these Internet predators to justice, Steve will also advocate for additional resources, tools, and protections for law enforcement, prosecutors, and Virginia families.

Steve Shannon is dedicated to supporting the following initiatives to help law enforcement keep our children safe:

- **Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces.** The federal ICAC Task Force Program was created to help state and local law enforcement agencies enhance their investigative response to offenders using the Internet to sexually exploit children. In Virginia, there are two federally funded Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces: one in Northern Virginia through the Virginia State Police, and a second in Southern Virginia through the Bedford County Sheriff's Office.⁹ These ICAC Task Forces have done great work. In 2004, a federal grant helped establish the NOVA-DC ICAC task force, which in the year 2005 received 210 CyberTips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, opened 80 cases and made 29 arrests.¹⁰ After receiving state funding in 2008, the NOVA-DC ICAC task force was able to handle:
 - 174 Child Pornography investigations (500% over 2007)
 - 99 Enticement cases (doubled that of 2007)
 - 300 training sessions for law enforcement officers¹¹



However, these task forces are understaffed and underfunded. Steve Shannon will fight for resources to support the task forces.

- **A pilot program to provide grants for full-time, dedicated Internet Crimes Against Children investigators in local law enforcement agencies.** Virginia's two ICAC Task Forces often work with other localities around the state to identify and arrest online offenders. However, many local police departments and sheriffs' offices do not have staff solely dedicated to these efforts. Steve Shannon will create a pilot grant program that will provide funding for law enforcement agencies that want to dedicate a full-time investigator to ICAC issues.

- **The latest technology for law enforcement.** Internet predators are constantly getting smarter about how to skirt the law to pursue victims. Tracking software is constantly being refined. Law enforcement must continue to keep up with the latest innovative technology to stay one step ahead of these criminals.
- **A blitz campaign against online offenders.** Steve Shannon will enforce an effort to let predators know that they WILL be caught and prosecuted vigorously. The campaign will include a public advertising component. Additionally, Steve will work with the Governor, the General Assembly and local law enforcement agencies to increase arrests by upping law enforcement capacity and focusing on Internet crimes against children.

3 As more young Virginians are using the Internet – and in particular social networking sites – Steve Shannon will work to make these sites safer for kids by:

- **Banning predators from social networking sites.** Websites like Facebook and MySpace are popular places for Internet predators to find their victims. Several states have passed legislation making it a crime for a convicted sex offender to join social networking sites. Steve Shannon will do the same in Virginia.
- **Requiring social networking sites to provide law enforcement with information about registered sex offenders using their sites.** Social networking providers must play a role in making sure sex offenders do not use their websites as a means to lure young victims. Steve will issue regular subpoenas to sites like MySpace and Facebook to make sure they inform law enforcement of registered sex offenders using their sites.
- **Working with other attorneys general and the federal government to regulate social networking websites and peer-to-peer networks.** Steve will make sure website hosts do not turn a blind eye to illegal material on their websites. He will coordinate with attorneys general around the country to make sure these web hosts play a role in fighting Internet crimes against children.



4

While Virginia has taken steps in recent years to protect Virginians against online offenders, there are some additional actions we can take. Steve Shannon believes in:

- **Mandatory minimums for distributing child pornography the first time.** Section 18.2-374.1:1 of the *Code of Virginia* lays out penalties for any person who reproduces (or distributes) child pornography. For a second or subsequent offense, there is a mandatory minimum jail sentence of five years. Steve Shannon believes this mandatory minimum should apply to the first offense and that mandatory minimums for the second or subsequent offense should be doubled to 10 years. He will work with the Governor and the General Assembly to make this change.
- **Increased penalties for soliciting and sexually exploiting children using the Internet.** Section 18.2-374.3 of the *Code of Virginia* makes it a Class 5 felony to use a computer or other electronic means to solicit a child to participate in sexual activity. If the offender is seven or more years older than the victim, there is a mandatory minimum jail sentence of five years. Steve Shannon will work with the Governor and General Assembly to make this crime a Class 4 felony and double the mandatory minimum jail time for offenders to 10 years.
- **Work with law enforcement to publicize the number of ICAC cases that have been opened, pursued, and closed.** Steve Shannon will work with law enforcement to make regular reports available to the public. The reports would include the number of convictions made in relation to the number of known cases of Internet crimes against children in Virginia.



5

Steve Shannon pledges to do his job as Attorney General to protect Virginians. But he also believes that each of us can take responsibility to help keep Virginia safe. Educating our citizens about the risk factors and dangers of surfing the Internet will help reduce the number of kids being victimized. We all need to do our part.

Steve Shannon will help citizens take a proactive approach by:

- **Educating kids.** Steve will work with the Department of Education to develop a best practices database for teaching Internet safety to be used by schools around Virginia.
- **Educating parents.** Parents are kids' first and most important teachers. To help parents understand the dangers of Internet predators and how to avoid them, Steve Shannon will create an Internet safety website with tips, resources, and important contact information. This site will arm parents with tools to keep their kids safe and provide information on what to do if they suspect trouble.
- **Educating the community.** Steve will create partnerships with private employers, nonprofits, and faith-based groups to raise awareness in Virginia communities about Internet crimes against children and how to avoid them.



Citations

1. http://www2.dailyprogress.com/cdp/news/local/crime/article/online_crimes_against_youth_on_the_rise/36022
2. Internet Watch Foundation Annual Report, 2006, <http://www.enough.org/inside.php?tag=statistics>
3. Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later, Report funded by the U.S. Congress through a Grant to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (2006), <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf>
4. http://www2.dailyprogress.com/cdp/news/local/crime/article/online_crimes_against_youth_on_the_rise/36022/
5. Internet Watch Foundation Annual Report, 2006, <http://www.enough.org/inside.php?tag=statistics>
6. Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later, Report funded by the U.S. Congress through a Grant to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (2006), <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV138.pdf>
7. Information provided by the Wyoming Bureau of Criminal Investigation's Operation Fairplay
8. Garber, Kent (March 24, 2009). "The Internet's Hidden Energy Hogs: Data Servers". U.S. News & World Report. <http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/energy/2009/03/24/the-internets-hidden-energy-hogs-data-servers.html>. Retrieved on 2007-03-25.
9. Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Regional contacts, http://www.icctraining.org/TF_Contacts.htm#Virginia,_Northern
10. Virginia State Police Press Release, Ten Virginians Arrested for Soliciting Minors Via Internet, November 22, 2005, <http://www.novadcicac.org/novnr.htm>
11. Virginia Internet Crimes Against Children Interim Report 2009, Promise to Protect