



**PATRICIA R. LYKOS**  
**DISTRICT ATTORNEY**  
**HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

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Public Information Office  
Donna Hawkins  
George Flynn  
(713) 755-3320

**Media Advisory**

**DA Warns Parents about Internet Child Predators**

Houston, Tx — Harris County District Attorney Pat Lykos is initiating a program to warn parents of the dangers of child predators lurking on the Internet and game systems. Recent cases involve contact between sexual offenders and children on PlayStation systems, World of Warcraft games, Xbox systems, and even iPod Touch devices and cell phones.

Assistant District Attorneys and police officers associated with the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task force are available to speak to community associations and groups to help parents and educators deal with this problem. To request a speaker for an event, call the District Attorney's Office Public Information Section at 713-755-3320.

"Most parents do not realize that even a game system like PlayStation or X Box can be manipulated by a child predator to make contact and chat with a young child. Additions such as cameras and video screens can enable sex offenders to view your children and compromise their safety," Lykos states. "This advisory is to alert parents to the inherent dangers of these systems, and ask them to be proactive in monitoring their children's use."

Lykos formed the Child Exploitation Section when she took office last year and prioritized cases where children are victimized by pedophiles. Harris County was the first county in the nation to file a criminal case against a man who solicited an 11-year-old child on a PlayStation game device. The manufacturer was very cooperative in the investigation.

Eric Devlin, Chief of the Child Exploitation Section, says that parents need to know that the Internet has advanced beyond computers, and is now available in cell phones, video systems and other items commonly used by youngsters.

"Parents should realize that predators go where the kids are," Devlin says. "If your children can digitally reach outside of their home, a predator can just as easily reach in. The only way to truly safeguard your children is to learn the technology for yourself and pay attention to what they are doing."

One simple step to prevent such contact is to only allow the use of game systems in common areas of the home, such as family rooms or kitchens, which allows for constant monitoring. Also, parents can install monitoring software on their systems that enables parents to control and view the interactions with others. Blocking software will allow the games to be played but will prevent others from making contact with potential victims. Maintaining an open relationship and discussion with children may also prevent their exploitation. (END)

