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Contact: Jim Kaitschuk, (217) 753-2372, jim@ilsheriff.org

Illinois Sheriffs' Association Urges Parents, Educators, and Communities to Prioritize Online Safety as Students Head Back to School

Springfield, IL — As students across Illinois prepare to return to classrooms, the Illinois Sheriffs' Association is calling on parents, teachers, and community members to stay vigilant and proactive in protecting children from the increasing threat of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

The start of a new school year brings new opportunities—and new risks—as students spend more time online for learning, connecting, and socializing. To address these risks, the Illinois Sheriffs' Association proudly supports the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's **Know2Protect** national campaign and its powerful **Pledge2Protect** initiative.

Online child exploitation is a devastating and growing crisis. In 2023 alone, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received over 36 million reports of child sexual abuse material online—up dramatically from 1 million reports in 2014. Increased screen time, evolving technologies, and a lack of community awareness have allowed these crimes to flourish.

“This is not just a federal issue—it’s a local one. Every sheriff in Illinois stands committed to protecting our children. But we cannot do it alone,” said Jim Kaitschuk, Executive Director of the Illinois Sheriffs' Association. **“It takes informed parents, alert teachers, and engaged communities to ensure our kids stay safe in the digital world.”**

Through the **Know2Protect** campaign and its in-person educational arm, **Project iGuardian**, families, schools, and organizations can access free age-appropriate resources, attend trainings, and learn critical prevention and reporting strategies. Nearly 122,000 individuals have already been reached through this effort, with 99% of participants recommending it to others.

How You Can Help:

- **Visit [Know2Protect.gov](https://www.know2protect.gov)** to learn more about online threats, prevention strategies, and to take the **Pledge2Protect**.
- **Request a free presentation** for your school or community through Project iGuardian.
- **Download and share awareness materials**, including posters, discussion guides, and social media content.
- **Encourage open conversations** with children and teens about online safety and reporting uncomfortable or suspicious behavior.

As the new academic year begins, let's commit together to building safer communities—online and off.

For more information or to request local support, email know2protect@hsi.dhs.gov.

Together, we can stop online child exploitation.

About the Illinois Sheriffs' Association

Founded in 1928, the Illinois Sheriffs' Association is committed to strengthening the office of Sheriff through training, public education, and legislative advocacy. Representing all 102 Illinois counties, ISA works to foster safer communities through the collaborative efforts of law enforcement, community partners, and engaged citizens.

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