

TOP OF THE BAY JOURNAL

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INFORMER

state

Fasano Introduces Legislation To Prosecute Website Operators

By Greg Giordano

Senator Mike Fasano and State Representative Robert Schenk held a joint press conference on February 12th to announce the filing of legislation that will help prosecute child modeling website operators who exploit children. Attorney General Bill McCollum attended the press conference, which was held in Tallahassee, to show his support for the bill.

The idea for the bill first came out of a series of stories broadcast on WFLA Channel 8 in which a Tampa Bay-based website was exposed for selling access to photos and videos of minors in suggestive poses. In many of the photographs the models are barely clothed. News media in both South Florida and in Orlando subsequently brought to the public's attention a similar website which used child models as young as ten years old. The website operators have hid behind the shield of the free speech as a justification for the existence of their businesses.

This legislation will provide a tool for prosecutors to bring charges against those who walk the thin line between



Senator Mike Fasano

producing child pornography and producing the images available on these type of child modeling websites. By expanding the definition of obscenity, much of what is sold online as so-called legitimate photographs and videos of children would become illegal and those who produce them subject to criminal prosecution.

"This bill will put an end to the exploitation of children who are duped into believing that they are pursuing a legitimate modeling career," Senator Fasano stated at the press conference. "These children have become the objects of obsession of individuals whose sole purpose is to view these photographs and videos to satisfy their own interests. This bill will help protect those children from entering a future that may include hardcore pornography and the abuse that may come from being a part of that world."

Unsuccessful attempts to prosecute website operators in the past may truly become a thing of the past. Both Senator Fasano and Representative Schenk urged their colleagues in the legislature to support this legislation which will give state attorneys an opening to pursue criminal charges against the people who exploit children for their own personal gain. ♦

Senator Mike Fasano, (R-New Port Richey), District-11 is available at (727) 848-5885.

county

Clerk Of The Circuit Court

by Hon. Ken Burke



The Self Help Centers created by the Clerk's Office, the Sixth Judicial Circuit and the Community Law Program have new services. "When we opened we were not set up to take credit card payments," said Burke. "Payment is required to schedule an attorney appointment. Our customers had to come into the centers twice, once to pay for and schedule an appointment and again for the appointment."

The Centers, which charge pro se or self-represented civil court litigants \$1 per minute for attorney sessions, now accept credit card payments over the phone enabling customers to call and schedule an appointment with the attorney, according to Burke.

Attorney appointments may be scheduled for a minimum of 15 minutes to a maximum of one hour in 15-minute increments. There are no income eligibility requirements. Refunds will not be issued for missed appointments. Attorneys may assist with civil-action legal forms (i.e. family law, landlord-tenant, small claims) and can not represent customers in court.

Working with the Hispanic Outreach Center, the Clerk's Office has made the Centers more accessible to the Spanish speaking citizens. Fridays from 8:30am until 12:30pm, a Spanish interpreter will be available at the Clearwater Center located at 324 S. Ft. Harrison Ave. and the Self Help Centers' brochure has been translated to Spanish.

More information is available at www.pinellasclerk.org or by calling (727) 464-5150. ♦

Ken Burke can be contacted at Clerk of the Circuit Court, (727) 464-3341, www.pinellasclerk.org.

Area Fire Rescue Agencies Receive FEMA Grants