

Oregon legislators crack down on internet sexual predators

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

The Oregon House of Representatives on Friday unanimously approved a measure that will make it a crime to solicit minors over the Internet. The bill, HB 3515, creates the crime of online sexual corruption, which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and requires those convicted to register as sex offenders in the state.

“We have to face the reality that Oregon’s children are increasingly vulnerable targets, the more time they spend online,” said House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland). “This bill gives will give parents more peace of mind and it will give law enforcement more authority to pursue criminals who target kids.”

In the same way that the automobile transformed the way that criminals preyed on their victims, the Internet allows sexual predators to mask their true identity and intention. Predators used to lure children into a car with the promise of toys or candy, and then disappear anonymously into the flow of traffic. Now, the Internet provides a channel where those predators can develop a trust and familiarity with a child under that same cover of anonymity. Armed with that false sense of security, children are more willing to meet their new friends in person, opening them up to abduction, sexual abuse or worse.

“Where predators of the past lurked in the shadows of dark streets, too many now hide in the anonymity offered by the Internet,” said Rep. Greg Macpherson, chair of the house Judiciary Committee. “It’s time for us to shine the light on them.”

While predators can now be charged with a crime when they attempt to engage in sex with an underage partner, HB 3515 helps prevent that dangerous situation from ever occurring. This bill now makes it a crime to propose such a meeting, even if the predator hasn’t yet shown up on the child’s doorstep.

“The world has changed and criminals are taking advantage of that. We have a responsibility to shut down the avenues they use to exploit or attack our children,” Merkley said.

The bill now proceeds to the Senate for consideration.

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