



Florida House of Representatives
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House Committees

Chair, Joint Committee on Government Accountability
Policy and Budget Council
Utilities & Telecommunications Committee
Education Innovation and Career Preparation Committee
Courts Committee

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 22, 2006

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“Internet Predator Awareness Act” Could Become Landmark Law for Florida

TALLAHASSEE, FL – Florida moved one step closer this week to being the first state to pass landmark consumer protection legislation affecting the safety of users of on-line dating sites. The pending bill known as the Internet Predator Awareness Act, sponsored by Representative Kevin Ambler (R – Tampa), passed its first hurdle on Wednesday when it was unanimously approved by a House Committee in Tallahassee. Rep. Ambler stressed to the Committee the importance of Florida taking the lead in the nation by being the first state to compel internet dating services to do a better job of informing unsuspecting members about the dangers posed by predators who use internet dating websites. HB 531 requires that online dating websites provide safe dating tips to users in Florida along with a disclosure stating whether or not the dating service conducts criminal background screenings on their members before they are permitted to directly contact each other. Currently, over 24 million Americans are estimated to be using internet dating services. Law enforcement authorities estimate that over 50,000 predators may be online on any given day. Since members of online dating services often list many details about their personal lives and the type of person they are looking to meet, it can become a virtual card catalog for predators to search tens of thousands of online profiles and find vulnerable unsuspecting victims. Often, it can be the children of single women who become the real targets of these cyber predators. For these reasons, a spokesman for Attorney General Bill McCollum appeared at the House Committee hearing to support Ambler’s bill as part of a package of tough crime fighting legislation filed this year to crack down on the growing problem of sexual predators using the internet to meet children. In the past, internet service providers and dating companies have spent thousands of dollars on high paid lobbyists to defeat attempts in other states to pass similar legislation. These efforts underscore the increasing tension that exists between government efforts to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens through consumer protection laws and the resistance posed by commercial companies which have continually fought any legislative efforts involving activity on the internet.

“Nowadays, the internet has become a convenient way to meet new people, however we have to be mindful that there are thousands of predators online everyday too,” said Representative Ambler. “The Internet Predator Awareness Act will ensure that Floridians who use an online dating service will be warned to stop and think “who am I really talking to.” Rep. Ambler stressed that the purpose of his bill is bring awareness to consumers of the potential dangers of internet dating and the importance of exercising caution before agreeing to meet someone through an on-line match up. “We all

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know that love can be blind, but if this bill can keep even one person from being victimized by opening their eyes through better awareness and making them more cautious about meeting strangers online, then the bill will have accomplished its purpose.” Ambler said.

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