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CONTACT:
Julie Teer
Laura Nicoll
(617) 725-4025

HEALEY PUSHES TOOL TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM SEX OFFENDERS
New technology teaches children and teens about potential dangers of Internet use

SOMERVILLE – Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey today lauded a new educational tool designed to help protect children and teens from sexual predators and encouraged parents and educators to be informed of the possible dangers that children can face while surfing the web.

“The Internet is a great place for kids to learn, play games, and chat with friends, but they need to be aware that dangerous sex offenders can easily disguise themselves in the cyber world,” said Healey. “Today we are giving parents and children the tools to help protect them from the clutches of sexual predators.”

During a visit to the East Somerville Community School, Healey unveiled the NetSmartz Workshop, an interactive, educational safety resource that will be available to educators in Massachusetts to teach kids and teens how to use the Internet more safely. Through a customized program, educators can download activities, games, and teens vignettes and also teach children and teens on web safety in group settings. Parents and after-school program providers can also use the free web-based tool to help keep children and teens safer from dangerous people who lurk in chat rooms and various Internet sites.

According to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children’s *Online Victimization: A Report on Our Nation’s Youth*, of more than 30 million children in the United States who use the Internet, approximately one in five children received a sexual solicitation or approach over the web. In addition, one in 33 received an aggressive sexual solicitation that included an invitation to meet them at a certain location, a telephone call or regular mail, money, or gifts.

“Our best chance of protecting our children is to teach them how to avoid being a victim. NetSmartz is a free resource for parents, educators, and law enforcement that is adaptable and entertains while educating even the most tech savvy children and teens,” said Rick Minicucci, President of NetSmartz.

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NetSmartz was created by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and Boys & Girls Clubs of America to prevent children from being victimized online and help increase self-confidence when they use the Internet. NetSmartz uses 3-D and 2-D technology to create animated characters that entertain children while educating them about online dangers and how to avoid them.

Specialized technology educators from over 220 districts in Massachusetts, approximately two-thirds of the total districts, will attend workshops to learn about the Internet safety program. Schools will receive a free downloadable version of the interactive activities to install on school computers.

To better inform parents about the potential dangers of the Internet, Comcast New England Cable will air a Public-Service Announcement on the NetSmartz program that will run for six months and reach 2.6 million Massachusetts residents.

“Comcast is proud to work with Lieutenant Governor Healey and NetSmartz to protect our children on the Internet,” said Paul D’Arcangelo, area vice president for Comcast New England East. “Teaching students Internet safety goes a long way towards ensuring that children can take advantage of the Internet as an important educational resource while avoiding its dangers.”

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