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Online Sexual Predator Law Lacks Teeth, Expert Says

Last week, the big news in New York was that the state had utilized the law known as e-Stop (The Electronic Security and Targeting of Online Predators approved by NY State Senate in 2008) that helped MySpace and Facebook purge more than 3,500 sexual predators from their membership rolls. The cameras rolled as New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo - heralded the exercise of the law and his efforts to make the Internet safer for kids. Moreover, other states are looking to enact similar laws around the country.

However, according to one social media expert, it's all window dressing but there's nothing behind the curtain.

"Don't get me wrong," said Mary Kay Hoal, activist mom and -President of Yoursphere.com, a safety-first social network for kids only. "I want to support every effort of every person and company that works hard to pass laws designed to try to make the Internet safer for kids. The intentions were good (of e-Stop and Cuomo), but the fact of the matter is it will have little to no impact in stemming the tide of predators lurking online. It's toothless because it depends on convicted sexual offenders volunteering information."

Hoal's point is that more than 100,000 sexual predators were already known to be online using the world's largest social networking sites yet the predators still persisted successfully in continuing to join as evidenced by these additional 3,500 sex offenders being found on these sites from New York state.

"Only about 10 percent of them volunteered a MySpace or Facebook screen name," Hoal said. "And who is to say they don't have four or five other identities online they aren't divulging? While the best of intentions are behind this law, because neither site verifies identities, performs a predator check and eliminates anonymity, a false sense of security is bestowed upon the public. There's nothing to prevent a single predator from creating new false internet identifiers and signing right back up. That's something parents and the public need desperately to understand."

Mary Kay Hoal applauded Cuomo, and all those who try to hold social networks accountable for keeping kids safe online and over the Internet. .

"I just feel a great sense of concern for the general public, and particularly parents that care about the safety of their children. Parents lack the knowledge to understand that e- STOP doesn't do enough. Providing a false sense of security to the general public concerns me."

According to the Attorney General's office, the e-STOP system only works if criminals volunteer their social networking identities, as the law requires them to do within 10 days of creating a new account. If they don't they could face new felony charges. Proponents of the law have declared it a success.

"While we have to recognize there is no 100 percent foolproof method for keeping our kids safe from predators and the other concerning factors that await our children online, it's imperative that a partnership involve informed parents as well as morally responsible social networks", Hoal said. "The fact is that MySpace and Facebook have chosen not to take advantage of reasonable methods of existing technology to proactively prevent anyone, regardless of their criminal past, from establishing a profile on their systems and engaging with our children. From my parental point of view, it is unconscionable that these situations happen every day and parents haven't been armed with the proper knowledge, tools and solutions to put their children's (and their own) safety first. Until such time, it's deeply concerning for any person(s) or company to promote a 'safer Internet.'"

About Mary Kay Hoal

A proud wife and mother of five children (both biological and adopted, ranging in age from 5-18 years old), Mary Kay faces the same challenges every parent does. After researching the disturbing landscape of social networking sites - including endless inappropriate content and thousands of predators targeting youth - Mary Kay' conceived and founded Yoursphere.



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