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## **NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Wisconsin DOJ Works To Protect Children in a Digital World**

MADISON, Wis. – As students across Wisconsin head back to school, Attorney General Josh Kaul is visiting communities across the state to raise awareness of ways the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) works to protect kids in a digital world. Within DOJ the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) and the Office of School Safety (OSS) work in tandem to protect kids online by offering reporting tiplines, investigating internet crimes against children, and providing trainings and resources for parents, educators and local law enforcement.

“In today’s world, it’s critically important to be able to navigate the digital world safely,” said AG Kaul. “Resources are available that can help Wisconsin’s youth with online safety.”

#### **Reports of Online Exploitation Cases Increase**

We live in a digital world, and reports of online exploitation of children continue to rise nationwide and in Wisconsin. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) runs the CyberTipline, where both Electronic Service Providers, such as Facebook, Snapchat, Google, TikTok and citizens may file reports of online exploitation. This increase is important for parents and guardians to be aware of, as there are real threats to children using the internet without guidance. These threats can include cyber bullying, exposure to Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), contact from adults looking to obtain CSAM from the child and possessing or distributing CSAM images or videos.

Currently, one of the more significant threats to children online comes in the form of sextortion. Sextortion is a form of sexual exploitation where the offender threatens to release compromising material of the victim unless the victim sends money, gift cards, and/or additional sexual content, or engages in sexual activity. Children are particularly vulnerable to this type of crime. Sextortion has led to tragic consequences for victims, including mental health crisis and suicide.

*If you or someone you know is in crisis, the National Suicide Hotline is 988. You can call or text to reach a mental health professional.*

In 2025 so far, the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force has received approximately 400 CyberTips related to sextortion. In 2024, the task force received approximately 230 CyberTips related to sextortion, up from approximately 170 in 2023. These numbers do not include cases reported directly to local law enforcement agencies.

Sextortion related tips are just one of the types of CyberTipline tips received by the Task Force. In 2024, for example, the Wisconsin ICAC Task Force received approximately 11,000 total tips, compared to approximately 7,000 total tips in 2022.

### **Tips For Teens Who May Be Victims of Sextortion**

- Remember, it's not your fault!
- It's never too late to get help. Tell a parent or trusted adult right away.
- Do not pay money or comply with the blackmailer's requests.
- Report the account through the platform's safety feature.
- Block the suspect, but DO NOT DELETE the messages or your profile to preserve potential evidence for law enforcement.
- Report the crime to law enforcement or at [CyberTipLine.com](https://www.cybertipline.com).

### **Online Safety Tips for Parents**

The best way parents can protect children online is through creating and maintaining open lines of communication. Prepare your children for the online world as you would the real world. Talk to them about dangers and risks online. Talk with your children about their online activity, including the websites they are visiting, the people they are communicating with, the information they are posting about themselves, and any situations that make them feel scared, uncomfortable or confused. The Wisconsin ICAC Task Force offers a variety of online safety resources for parents and caregivers. Additional resources can be found on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's website [missingkids.org/netsmartz](https://missingkids.org/netsmartz).

As children and teens prepare to head back to school, it is a good time to have a conversation about what healthy relationships look like and to address sensitive, but important, topics such as consent, sexting, and cyberbullying. Discussing characteristics of a healthy relationship can help protect children from victimization both online and offline by giving them the tools to identify potentially unsafe or unhealthy relationships and to reach out for help if needed.

Being a good digital citizen means standing up for others. By teaching children to report unkind or inappropriate behavior online, we can empower them to not only stand up for themselves, but also help protect other children from potential victimization. If you see something, say something!

The Wisconsin ICAC Task Force is part of a nationwide network of 61 task forces. The task force in Wisconsin includes over 300 affiliate agencies across the state, including law enforcement, criminal justice agencies, and nonprofit organizations, and works to investigate and prosecute crimes against children that involve the internet, social media, and digital devices.

### **Report Online Concerns**

When students or community members have safety concerns, virtual or otherwise, about school aged youth, reports can be made to the Office of School Safety's Speak Up, Speak Out (SUSO) tipline. SUSO is a 24/7 statewide confidential reporting system free to all Wisconsin schools. It provides a single point of contact to report concerns to prevent violence and offer support for those who are struggling.

Since its inception in 2020, SUSO has received more than 17,000 tips. More than 1,000 of those tips relate directly to digital safety concerns.

SUSO Reports can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week:

- Online at [speakup.wisconsin.gov](https://speakup.wisconsin.gov)
- 1-800-MY-SUSO-1 (1-800-697-8761)
- Mobile app (iOS/Android)
- Text SUSO to 738477

Learn more at [speakup.wisconsin.gov](https://speakup.wisconsin.gov).