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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Vigilante Actions Can Hurt Ongoing Investigations, Endanger Safety

MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul today strongly discouraged citizens who are not affiliated with official law enforcement from engaging in vigilante activities. A resurgence of civilians attempting to lure suspected online predators has occurred in Wisconsin, putting in danger civilian bystanders, the vigilantes, and the suspects.

Recently in Jefferson County, an online vigilante group recorded an attempted a sting operation in a public place. Groups like that one, operating outside of the law, can endanger the safety of nearby members of the public, the suspect, and the vigilantes themselves. Vigilante actions risk interrupting an ongoing authorized investigation, possibly resulting in dangerous criminals walking free. Referrals resulting from vigilante actions to a district attorney can face legal challenges in prosecution.

“Vigilante ‘sting’ operations are illegal, they put innocent bystanders in danger, and they can increase the chance that someone who has committed a crime will go free,” said Attorney General Kaul. “Law enforcement officers, in coordination with prosecutors, are best able to safely apprehend suspects and to ensure that someone who has committed a crime is successfully prosecuted.”

Jefferson County District Attorney Susan Happ remarked, “While these vigilante groups are well intentioned, the cases created through such vigilante activity rarely lead to criminal charges. When citizens take matters into their own hands, it can be extremely harmful to a successful prosecution. Law enforcement professionals have to complete strict training to learn proper techniques for these types of investigations, and they have the necessary experience to collect and preserve digital evidence.

Citizens lack this critical experience and training, and the vigilantes' actions may result in important evidence being destroyed, compromised or suppressed. This can negatively impact our ability to effectively do our job.”

Wisconsin Internet Crimes Against Children Bureau requests any suspicious activity be reported to law enforcement immediately. Tips can be submitted by calling 1-800-843-5678 or online at <http://www.missingkids.org/cybertipline>.