

Protecting Our Children



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

All too often, we hear of crimes against children that remind us of the challenges we face in protecting them. While we cannot shield them

from every conceivable threat, there are some key ways to reduce the risk of harm.

For example, families deserve to know their neighborhoods are free of parole violators who have already harmed children and could easily do so again. I was alarmed last August to learn that almost 200 paroled child sex offenders were unaccounted for in Texas, free to surface in places frequented by children. I formed the Fugitive Unit as part of my Criminal Investigation Division to track down these offenders and put them back behind bars.

So far, my office has arrested more than 70 child predators. One parolee was found watching children on a busy playground. Another was nabbed after he joined a San Antonio health club with an attached child care facility. As long as these fugitives are on the loose, similar frightening scenarios are possible. We will not rest until these sex offenders are in custody again, no longer posing a threat to Texas children.

Kids also face increasing risk from Internet predators. Investigators in my office's Cyber Crimes Unit continuously patrol Internet chat rooms to intercept these predators to catch them before they sexually abuse a child. Just last month, a guilty verdict was handed down against a child predator and former computer engineer who attempted to arrange a sexual encounter with what he thought was a 13-year-old girl he met online. To date, more than 40 people have been arrested and jailed by the Cyber Crimes Unit. Most have been indicted and await trial. My staff also accepts complaints and works with local, state and federal authorities to investigate and prosecute crimes involving online child pornography.

Beyond protecting children's physical safety, there are other tangible ways to support a child's well-being. Child support, for example, helps parents pay for basic necessities like food and shelter. Research shows that children who receive regular child support also make better grades in school, are more likely to finish high school and attend college, have fewer behavior problems at school, and are more likely to see their fathers. Last year, my office's Child Support Division collected \$1.5 billion in child support that benefitted more than 600,000 Texas children. The division also works with schools to educate students about the responsibilities that come with parenting, and collaborates

with organizations that help fathers stay involved in their children's lives.

To be sure, the job of protecting and supporting kids rests primarily with parents. But the rest of us will be measured to a large extent by how well we support them in this endeavor. We must continue to rise to this challenge.

To find out more about how the Office of the Attorney General helps children, visit our Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us. To apply for child support services, you can also call the Child Support Division at 1-800-252-8014.

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.