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ATTORNEY GENERAL RAOUL HIGHLIGHTS SAFER INTERNET DAY

Chicago — Attorney General Kwame Raoul today recognized 2022 Safer Internet Day by encouraging parents and guardians to participate in a virtual panel discussion focused on protecting children from online exploitation.

As part of this year's Safer Internet Day theme, "Together for a Better Internet," Raoul is urging parents and educators to help children and teens be more aware of their online activity, who they interact with online and what information they share about themselves. The Attorney General's office, together with the Illinois Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC), will host a free online panel discussion today to help adults and educators identify and prevent online child exploitation, or "sextortion." The discussion, which begins at 6:30 p.m., will help adults talk to children and teens about why they should not send, request or share sexually-explicit images or videos, regardless of threats they may receive. Individuals can [register here](#) to join the discussion.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the amount of time children and teens are spending online, and it is more important than ever that parents and guardians have ongoing conversations with children that will help them develop responsible online habits. Just because a child is in the room with you, it does not guarantee their safety online," Raoul said. "Safer Internet Day is an opportunity to talk to children about ways to protect themselves online and what to do if they end up in an unsafe situation. I encourage caregivers to participate in a free Safer Internet Day online panel discussion with experts from Illinois' Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force tonight to help youths stay safe online."

The ICAC Task Force has seen an increase in reports of child exploitation, and Attorney General Raoul is encouraging parents to talk to children about sextortion and how to handle a situation where someone is threatening them online. Sextortion is a form of online exploitation in which an individual uses grooming and coercion to acquire sexual content from a child. They may offer money, gift cards or even drugs in exchange for explicit photos or videos. Once initial explicit content is obtained from the child, the individual uses it as blackmail to acquire more sexual content from the child, to engage in sexual activity with the child, obtain money or make other demands. Raoul warns that perpetrators of this crime often create fake accounts pretending to be younger or a member of the opposite sex. They may create multiple identities to approach children on social media or through online gaming, after learning of the child's interests, friends, school or family. Once an online friendship or bond is established, the individual may request that communication be moved to other online platforms with encryption or private video chat and messaging. The "sextorter" will threaten to expose the child if their demands are not met.

Raoul is urging parents and guardians to have regular conversations with their children regarding their children's online activity and social media use, and discuss risks and safety. During the panel discussion, experts from the Attorney General's office and representatives from the ICAC Task Force will discuss sextortion itself and help parents and guardians set rules for their children's internet use. For example, parents should also educate themselves on the games and platforms their children utilize, check age restrictions, and use privacy settings and parental controls. Parents should discuss healthy relationships, how to maintain a positive online image (digital footprint), and what types of images are appropriate to share.

Attorney General Raoul offered additional tips for children to protect themselves and practice safe online habits:

- Never accept friend or follower requests from people they do not know in-person.
- Never share private information such as full name, date of birth, address, phone number, account passwords, or even the school they attend.
- If offered gifts, games, or money in exchange for explicit photos, always say no, block the user, and report to a trusted adult.
- Know that it's never too late to get help or report an incident, even if they made a mistake and supplied inappropriate images. Remember, the perpetrator is at fault.

In response to increasing reports of online child exploitation, the Attorney General's office hosts monthly webinars aimed at giving parents, guardians and educators tools to help children and teens foster healthy online interactions. The free webinars, which began Oct. 7 and take place on the first Thursday of each month, will teach parents and guardians about the social media apps children and teens may be using, how to identify signs that a child may have been a victim of online child solicitation, and more. Interested parties should email Karilyn.orr@ilag.gov to register. Parents, guardians and educators interested in participating in Raoul's Safer Internet Day discussion at 6:30 p.m. can [register here](#).

Illinois' ICAC Task Force is one of 61 ICAC Task Forces throughout the country and is comprised of a network of more than 285 local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies, and the task force covers 101 of Illinois' 102 counties. Since 2019, the Attorney General's ICAC Task Force has received more than 20,700 CyberTips and been involved in more than 203 arrests of sexual predators. Since 2006, the Attorney General's ICAC Task Force has been involved in more than 1,780 arrests of sexual predators. The task force also has provided internet safety training and education to more than 959,000 parents, teachers and students and more than 23,100 law enforcement professionals.