

NEWS RELEASE

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SCI, ATTORNEY GENERAL **ISSUE REPORT ON** **COMPUTER CRIME**

TRENTON — The State Commission of Investigation and the Office of the Attorney General today released the final report of an unprecedented joint effort to evaluate the threat posed by computer-related crimes in New Jersey.

The comprehensive report, an outgrowth of public hearings held last year, defines the scope of wide-ranging criminal activities that have proliferated with the explosive growth of the Internet and other forms of computer and telecommunications technology, including child sexual abuse, fraud, identity theft, hacking and espionage. In a series of recommendations, the two agencies call for strengthening of New Jersey's computer and technology crime laws, enhanced law enforcement training and coordination, and effective prevention and education programs, among other reforms.

SCI Chair Leslie Z. Celentano said the decision by the two agencies to mobilize combined resources demonstrates a recognition that the so-called “dark side” of high technology has grown to such an extent that a unified approach by law enforcement is required to meet the challenge.

“It is quite clear that while the Internet has proven to be an invaluable educational and research tool, it has also evolved into an illicit means for abuse and exploitation,” Celentano said. “Government at all levels, working with the private sector, needs to develop a coordinated strategy to combat this new criminal frontier. And, because technology advances at such a rapid pace, we need to position law enforcement to be able not only to respond to criminal exploitation but also to anticipate developments and to stay at least one step ahead.”

“This cooperative effort has resulted in concrete recommendations for strengthening state law, improving coordination and training for law enforcement and enhancing the public’s awareness of the dangers posed by the Internet and computer crime,” said Attorney General John J. Farmer, Jr. “Through efforts already underway, such as those typified by the work of the Attorney General’s Internet Working Group that includes the divisions of Consumer Affairs, Criminal Justice, Gaming Enforcement and State Police, law enforcement has been able to navigate the fast-changing terrain of cyberspace and computer crime and outpace the expectations of criminals using computers. Acting on these recommendations will allow us to keep our edge against those who would use computers and the Internet for illicit purposes.”

The SCI/OAG joint effort drew upon the expertise of local, state and federal authorities, as well as key elements of the private sector. Preliminary findings were aired during three days of public hearings in February 1999. Subsequent investigation shed additional light on a multiplicity of issues.

“During the hearings,” said SCI Commissioner M. Karen Thompson, “we heard sobering testimony about how computer technology has been subverted for personal gain at the expense of private citizens. Experts described schemes in which cyber-thieves stole the very identities of law-abiding individuals. We learned how con artists have turned the Internet into a primary tool of consumer fraud. With this report, it is time now to move beyond information and to act against these and other computer-related crimes.”

SCI Commissioner W. Cary Edwards said, “Cooperation at all levels formed the hallmark of this project, and should stand as an object lesson in how to proceed from here. My hope is that this report concludes only the first step in the Commission’s involvement, and that it will be able to obtain the resources necessary to continue its efforts in this rapidly changing and evolving area.”

SCI Commissioner Audriann Kernan said, “As a mother of three small children, I was particularly shocked at the extent to which the Internet has become a means for the abuse and exploitation of children. Sexual predators and purveyors of child pornography find the World Wide Web to be a convenient and camouflaged mechanism for plying

their trade. At the every least, we hope this project will result in heightened public awareness about this high-tech menace to society's most vulnerable.”