

## House Republican Press Release

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### **A. G. Blumenthal, General Law Committee Unveil Measure to Protect Children from Internet Predators**



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#### ***Bill would require Parental Permission, Age Verification to Access Social Networking Websites***

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Attorney General Richard Blumenthal and Democratic and Republican leaders of the General Law Committee today announced legislation requiring social networking web sites like MySpace, Xanga and others to verify users' ages, obtain parental consent to post profiles of minors and allow parents access to their children's pages.

General Law Co-Chairmen state Sen. Thomas Colapietro (D-Bristol), and state Rep. Christopher Stone (D-East Hartford), with ranking members state Sen. Sam Caligiuri (R-Waterbury) and state Rep. Leonard Greene (R-Beacon Falls), joined Blumenthal in endorsing the measure.



Under the proposal, sites that fail to verify ages and fail to obtain parental permission to post profiles of users under 18 face civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation. The legislation also allows individuals to bring private lawsuits. Information about parents would be checked and parents would be contacted directly when necessary.

“These sites must verify ages and give parents power to keep their children off these sites – contacting parents directly if necessary to confirm their consent,” Blumenthal said. “Failing to verify ages means that children are exposed to sexual predators who may be older men lying to seem younger. There is no excuse in technology or cost for refusing age verification. If we can put a man on the moon – or invent the Internet – we can reliably check ages.

“Strong interest in this measure was expressed to me by other Attorneys General at our national meeting yesterday. In Connecticut, at least six alleged sexual assaults involving older men and underage girls have been tied to MySpace in the last year. There have been dozens of similar arrests nationwide,” Blumenthal said.

“This bill helps protect kids – and puts parents back in control – against perils and predators on social networking sites. Age verification is the key to making social networking sites safer. Our proposal requires sites like MySpace to check ages for users or face stiff fines,” Blumenthal said. “The fact is, contrary to some industry claims, age verification is easy and effective. Sites can confirm the ages of younger users by requiring publicly available information from a parent or guardian. They can confirm information about parents and contact them directly. Social networking sites can be forced to make child safety a priority.

“Parents are the first and last line of defense against sexual predators and other social networking site dangers. This measure empowers parents – enabling them to decide whether their children put profiles on sites. Social networking sites must obtain parental permission to post a minor’s profile, assuring parents have the final say. This provision sends a powerful message: Respect the right and role of parents to restrict their children in social networking,” Blumenthal added.

“Parents are rightfully concerned that the internet ‘friends’ their children may be meeting and chatting with online could very well be sex offenders who use websites like MySpace as virtual stalking grounds,” Representative Greene said. “Most of these websites make only minimal efforts to ensure website users are who they say they are. Our bill will require them to take reasonable precautions to protect children against sexual predators and other undesirables without infringing on anyone’s constitutional rights.”

"This legislation is an effective way to help protect our youth. I look forward to working with Attorney General Blumenthal and the leadership of the General Law Committee to see that this bill is enacted this year," Senator Caligiuri said,

Blumenthal is helping lead a coalition of 44 states asking MySpace and its parent company, News Corp., to institute age verification and make other changes to better shield minors from sexual predators and inappropriate material. Members of the group also have met with other social networking web sites, such as Xanga and Facebook, about better protecting minors.