

14-year-old girl arrested after posting nude pics

BETH DeFALCO, March 27, 2009

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — A 14-year-old New Jersey girl has been accused of child pornography after posting nearly 30 explicit nude pictures of herself on MySpace.com — charges that could force her to register as a sex offender if convicted.

The case comes as prosecutors nationwide pursue child pornography cases resulting from kids sending nude photos to one another over cell phones and e-mail. Legal experts, though, could not recall another case of a child porn charge resulting from a teen's posting to a social networking site.

MySpace would not comment on the New Jersey investigation, but the company has a team that reviews its network for inappropriate images. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children tipped off a state task force, which alerted the Passaic County Sheriff's Office.

The office investigated and discovered the Clifton resident had posted the "very explicit" photos of herself, sheriff's spokesman Bill Maer said Thursday.

"We consider this case a wake-up call to parents," Maer said. The girl posted the photos because "she wanted her boyfriend to see them," he said.

Investigators are looking at individuals who "knowingly" committed a crime, he said, declining to comment further because the case is still being investigated.

The teen, whose name has not been released because of her age, was arrested and charged with possession of child pornography and distribution of child pornography. She was released to her mother's custody.

If convicted of the distribution charge, she would be forced to register with the state as a sex offender under Megan's Law, said state Attorney General Anne Milgram. She also could face up to 17 years in jail, though such a stiff sentence is unlikely.

Some observers — including the New Jersey mother behind the creation of Megan's Law — are criticizing the trend of prosecuting teens who send racy text messages or post illicit photos of themselves.

Maureen Kanka — whose daughter, Megan, became the law's namesake after she was raped and killed at age 7 in 1994 by a twice-convicted sex offender — blasted authorities for charging the 14-year-old girl.

The teen needs help, not legal trouble, she said.

"This shouldn't fall under Megan's Law in any way, shape or form. She should have an intervention and counseling, because the only person she exploited was herself."

Called "sexting" when it's done by cell phone, teenagers' habit of sending sexually suggestive photos of themselves and others to one another is a nationwide problem that has confounded parents, school administrators and law enforcers.

Prosecutors in states including Pennsylvania, Connecticut, North Dakota, Ohio, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin have tried to stop it by charging teens who send and receive the pictures.

In northeastern Pennsylvania, a prosecutor recently threatened to file child porn charges against three teenage girls who authorities say took racy cell-phone pictures that ended up on classmates' cell phones.

The MySpace case may be a first, though.

"I'm not sure I've seen a prosecution like this coming out of a social networking site," said Seth Kreimer, a constitutional law professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Milgram, the attorney general, could not recall another such case in New Jersey. She cautioned parents to get on those sites and monitor what their kids are talking about and posting.

"Unfortunately, youth don't have the same judgment as adults," she said, "and often, adults don't have the same technical savvy as the youth."

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14-Year Old Girl Arrested on Child Pornography Charges in New Jersey

In a bizarre case in New Jersey, a 14-year-old girl was arrested and charged with child pornography after posting nude photos of herself on her MySpace page.

A 14-year-old girl in Trenton, New Jersey has been arrested and charged with child pornography after posting roughly 30 nude pictures of herself on her profile at [MySpace.com](http://www.myspace.com). The pictures were apparently intended to be seen by her boyfriend, but were apparently available for the public to see. The case is important because it is the first high-profile prosecution of the act of "sexting", in which teens use [social network](#) profiles and cell phones to distribute lewd or nude photos of one another.

The problem is that many [teens](#) and tweens are far more technically savvy than their parents - and the authorities - and so the offenders are rarely caught.

And now that officials are trying to bring charges, concerned parents and citizens are questioning the validity of charging teens under laws that were designed to protect them. In addition to being charged with child pornography and distribution in New Jersey, the girl may also be required to register as a sex offender under the provisions of Megan's Law. At that point, the law has been flipped to punish the very people that it was designed to protect.

When a teen chooses to exploit him or herself online or on some other platform, how can authorities then claim that the teen is committing a crime? The laws are designed to protect the innocent from being exploited. As Maureen Kanka, the mother of the girl that inspired Megan's law after being raped and killed by a convicted sex offender, clearly stated:

"This shouldn't fall under Megan's Law in any way, shape or form. She should have an intervention and counseling, because the only person she exploited was herself."

By Buzzle Staff and Agencies

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