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Bee Column  
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### **e-STOP Law Purges Thousands of Registered Sex Offenders from Social Networking Sites**

The speed at which technology evolves is astounding. It seems as though every week new gadgets are introduced and upgrades to cell phones and computers are unveiled, allowing instantaneous communication 24 hours a day, seven days a week. While the Internet provides entertainment and educational benefits, it can also lead unsuspecting users into a dangerous trap.

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace, have features that allow its users to post photos and personal information to a profile, as well as status-update capability that keeps family and friends up-to-date on what's happening in their everyday lives. While this allows people to stay in better contact with one another, it can also give unwanted access to individuals who may use that information in a negative or even criminal way.

We in the New York State Legislature enacted the Electronic Security and Targeting of Online Predators Act (e-STOP), which removes online accounts and profiles from social networking sites that are linked to registered sex offenders. Since the passage of e-STOP, strict online regulations, including prohibiting certain sex offenders from accessing social networking websites and communicating with minors, have helped protect thousands of children who access the Web each day.

The popularity of social networking sites has resulted in the creation of millions of online personalized profiles, and although age restrictions have been implemented to prohibit users younger than 14 from creating online profiles, there are still loopholes that allow children access to these sites. It's these loopholes that also allow online predators the ability to shield their true identities to make unwanted sexual advances on our children. With e-STOP in place, more than two dozen social networking companies receive a list of updated sex offender information from law enforcement every week to identify predators and remove them from their social networking sites. These companies in turn alert law enforcement to potential sex offenders who use their sites.

New York was the first state in the nation to pass such stringent regulations prohibiting registered sex offenders from using social networking sites to prey on young teens and children. Under e-STOP sex offenders are mandated to register and keep law enforcement up-to-date on all current email accounts, screen names and any other form of Internet profiles.

While these protections have been put into place to help cut down on the number of incidents where predators have gained access to our children via the Internet, it's also imperative for parents and guardians to monitor what their youngsters are doing online.

People young and old should never put their address, telephone number or photos that indicate where they live, work or play on their social networking profile. Don't give predators the chance to make you or your child their next victim.

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