NEWS RELEASE

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MISSOURI WOMAN INDICTED ON CHARGES OF USING MYSPACE TO 'CYBER-BULLY' 13-YEAR-OLD WHO LATER COMMITTED SUICIDE

LOS ANGELES – A Missouri woman was indicted today on federal charges for fraudulently using an account on the social networking website MySpace.com to pose as a teenage boy who feigned romantic interest in a 13 year-old girl. That girl later committed suicide after the "boy" spurned her and told her, among other things, that the world would be a better place without her.

Lori Drew, 49, of O'Fallon, Missouri, was named in a four-count indictment returned this morning by a federal grand jury. The indictment charges one count of conspiracy and three counts of accessing protected computers without authorization to obtain information to inflict emotional distress on the girl who, because of juvenile privacy rules, is referred to in the indictment only as M.T.M.

The indictment alleges that Drew, along with others, registered as a member of MySpace under the name "Josh Evans." Drew and her co-conspirators then used the Josh Evans account to contact M.T.M. and began what the girl believed was an on-line romance with a 16-year-old boy. In taking those actions, the indictment alleges, Drew and her co-conspirators violated MySpace's "terms of service" (TOS) that prohibit users from, among other things, using fraudulent registration information, using accounts to obtain personal information about juvenile members, and using the MySpace communication services to harass, abuse or harm other members.

After approximately four weeks of flirtatious communications between "Josh

Evans" and M.T.M., Drew and her co-conspirators broke off the relationship. Within an hour, M.T.M. had hanged herself in her room. She died the next day.

"This adult woman allegedly used the Internet to target a young teenage girl, with horrendous ramifications," said United States Attorney Thomas P. O'Brien. "After a thorough investigation, we have charged Ms. Drew with criminally accessing MySpace and violating rules established to protect young, vulnerable people. Any adult who uses the Internet or a social gathering website to bully or harass another person, particularly a young teenage girl, needs to realize that their actions can have serious consequences."

To become a member of MySpace, individuals are required to submit registration information – including name and date of birth – and have to agree to certain TOS that regulate their use of the website. Among other things, the MySpace TOS require prospective members to provide truthful and accurate registration information; to refrain from using any information obtained from MySpace services to harass, abuse, or harm other people; to refrain from soliciting personal information from anyone under 18; to refrain from promoting information that they know is false or misleading; and to refrain from posting photographs of other people without their consent. The indictment alleges that Drew and her co-conspirators violated all of those provisions.

"Whether we characterize this tragic case as 'cyber-bullying,' cyber abuse or illegal computer access, it should serve as a reminder that our children use the internet for social interaction and that technology has altered the way they conduct their daily activities," said Salvador Hernandez, Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI in Los Angeles. "As adults, we must be sensitive to the potential dangers posed by the use of the Internet by our children."

The conspiracy count carries a maximum statutory penalty of five years in federal prison. Each count of accessing protected computers, each of which alleges that the access was for the purpose of intentionally inflicting emotional distress on M.T.M., carries a maximum possible penalty of five years in prison.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Drew will be summoned to appear for an arraignment in United States District Court in Los Angeles in June.

This case was investigated by special agents with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in St. Louis and Los Angeles.

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