



# To Catch a Predator: Emerging Trends in Child Exploitation Cases



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# Disclaimers

1. Not Legal Advice
2. Speaking in My Own Capacity
3. Not Creating Any Right or Benefit
4. Statistics Based on Sources Listed Here and Serve Only for Discussion and to Make General Points, Not Endorsing.

# Roadmap

1. Statistical Overview
2. Overview of Child Exploitation Crimes
3. Five Emergent Challenges
4. Case Study
5. Prevention

# 1. The Stats

# Stats: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (“NCMEC”) Tip Line

Reports Made Between Jan. 1 - June 30	2024	2025
Online Enticement	292,951	518,720
Sadistic Online Enticement	508	1,093
Financial Sextortion	13,842	23,593
Generative Artificial Intelligence	6,835	440,419
Child Sex Trafficking	5,976	62,891

# Stats: NCMEC Tip Line

Reports of online enticement increased by more than **300%** from **44,155** in 2021 to **186,819** in 2023.

In 2023, reports made to the CyberTipline rose more than **12%** from the previous year, surpassing **36.2 million** reports.

## **2. Commonly Charged Crimes**

# **Production of Child Pornography**

## **18 U.S.C. § 2251(a)**

- **15-year min./min., 30-year max.**
- **Must prove three things:**
  - 1. Defendant enticed, coerced, etc. minor to engage in sexually explicit conduct.**
  - 2. Defendant acted with purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct.**
  - 3. Visual depiction transported using any means or facility of interstate or foreign commerce.**
- **Typically internet-based activity**



# Enticing a Minor to Engage in Sexual Activity

## 18 U.S.C. § 2422(b)

- 10-year man./min., Life max.
- Must prove four things:
  1. Defendant knowingly enticed, coerced, etc. an individual to engage in sexually explicit conduct.
  2. Defendant used any facility or means of interstate or foreign commerce to do so.
  3. Defendant believed target to be a minor.
  4. Had the sexual activity occurred, the Defendant could be charged with a criminal offense

# Sex Trafficking

## 18 U.S.C. § 1591

- 15-year man./min., Life max.
- Must prove three things:
  1. Defendant knowingly recruited, enticed, solicited by any means a minor.
  2. The defendant committed the act knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that force, fraud, coercion ect. were be used to cause the minor to engage in a commercial sex act. And
  3. The defendant used a cell phone or the internet

# Receiving, Transporting, Distributing Child Pornography 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(1) and (2)

- Five-year min./max., 20-year max.
- Must prove two things:
  1. Defendant knowingly received, transported, or distributed child pornography by means of a facility of interstate commerce.
  2. Defendant knew materials were child pornography.

# Possessing Child Pornography

## 18 U.S.C. § 2252A(a)(5)

- No man./min., 10-year max.
- Must prove three things:
  1. Defendant knowingly possessed or accessed with the intent to view child pornography.
  2. The pornography was mailed, shipped, or transported using any facility of interstate or foreign commerce.
  3. When the Defendant possessed or accessed the material, he or she knew it was child pornography.
- Max. increases to 20 years for prepubescent.

# Definition of “Child Pornography”

- 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8)
- “Child pornography” covers “any visual depiction, including any photograph, film, video, picture, or computer or computer-generated image or picture”
- Image must be one of the following:
  - Depicts minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct;
  - Digital image actually depicts “or is indistinguishable from” a minor engaging in sexually explicit conduct; or
  - Digital image was created or modified to appear that an identifiable minor is engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

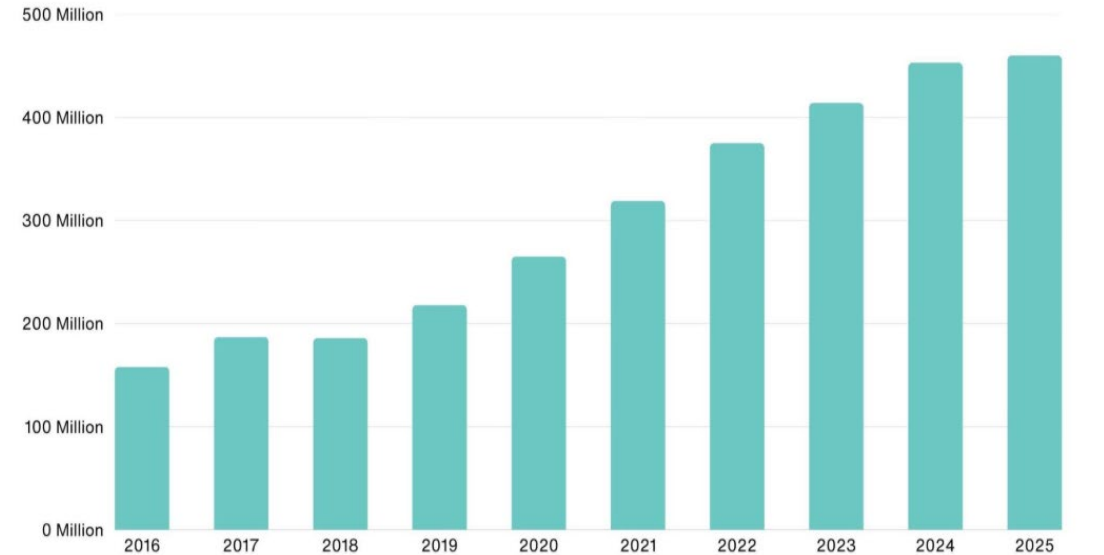
# Attempted v. Completed Crime

- For Child Exploitation, Penalties Generally the Same
- Important Prevention Tool
- Knowledge is Key
- Substantial Step
- Typical Use Cases:
  - Undercover Operation
  - Unidentified Minor
  - Incomplete Enticement Offense

# **3. Five Emergent Prosecution Challenges**

# 1. “Disappearing” Social Media Apps

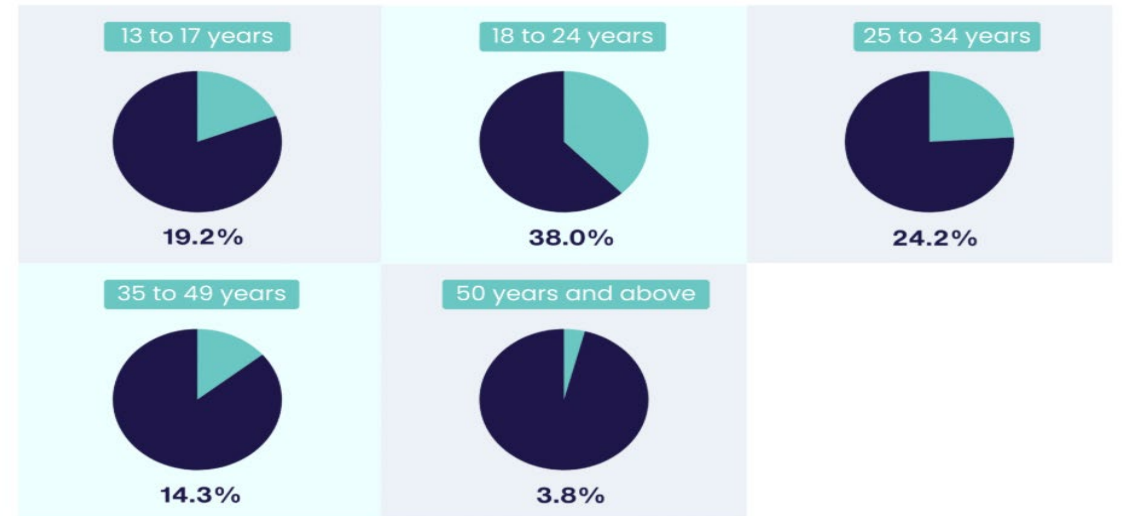
- Disappearing Message-Based Social Media Apps Increasingly Popular
- Messages Actually Disappear!
- Investigation Impacted



Snapchat Daily Active Users

demand**sage**

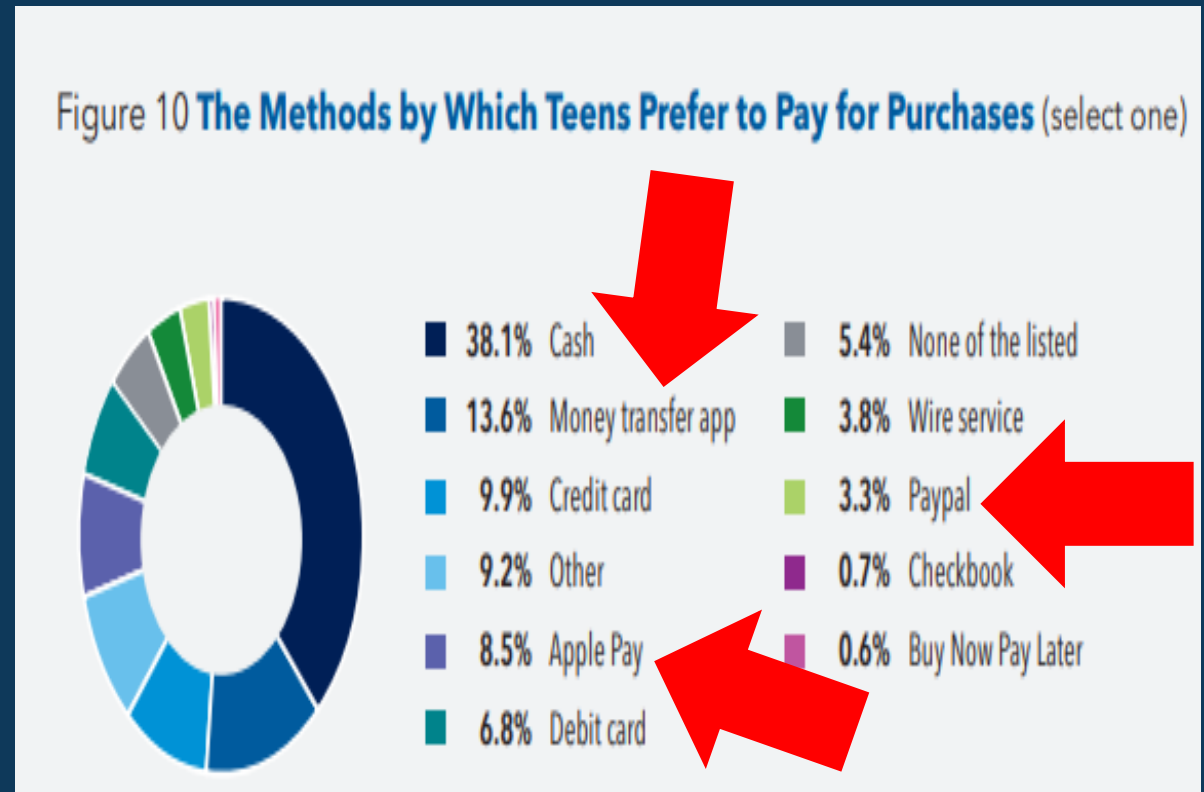
## Snapchat Users Demographics





## 2. Use of Payment Platforms

- Increasingly Accessible and Easy to Create
- Connection to Increased Cell Phone Usage
- Adds Complex Dynamic to Victim Experience



Source: Mission Square Research Institute, "How Teens Manage Money: Receiving, Spending, and Preferred Payment Methods," Available at: [https://research.missionsq.org/content/media/document/2025/6/113053\\_How%20Teens%20Handle%20Money\\_S.pdf](https://research.missionsq.org/content/media/document/2025/6/113053_How%20Teens%20Handle%20Money_S.pdf)

### 3. Self-Generated Images

- Accessibility of Cameras
- Increasing Percentage of Child Pornography Created by Minor Victims
- Predators Leverage Self-Created CSAM to Secure More



## 4. Rise of AI

- **Revenge Pornography and Use of Deepfakes**
- **Fake Profile Pictures to Facilitate Enticement**
- **Fake Child Pornography**

**Who you  
think you're  
talking to...**

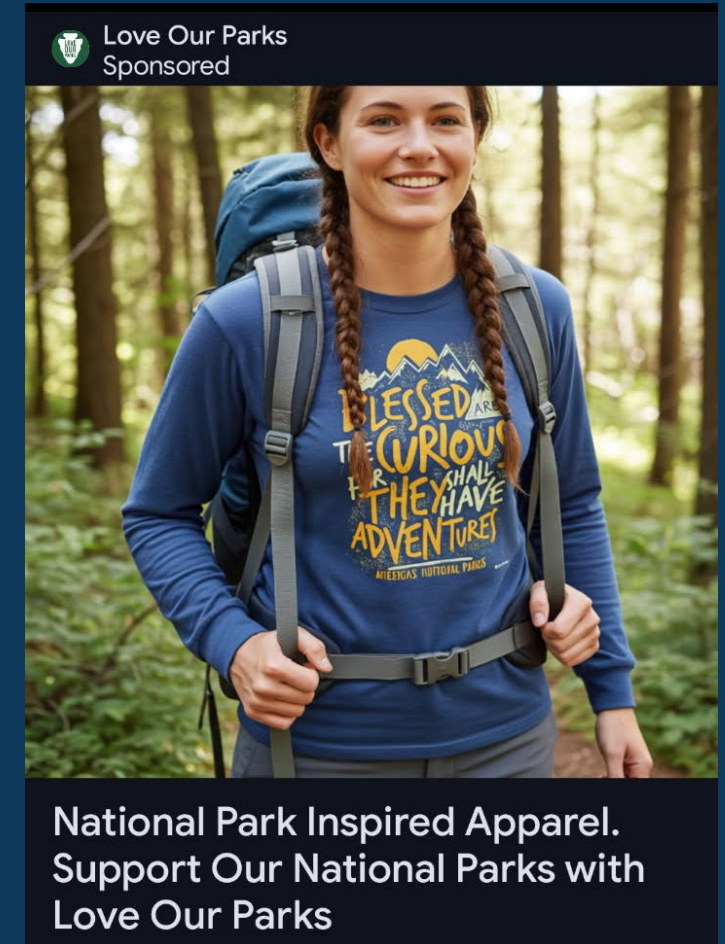




**Who you're  
really  
talking to...**



# AI-Generated Images

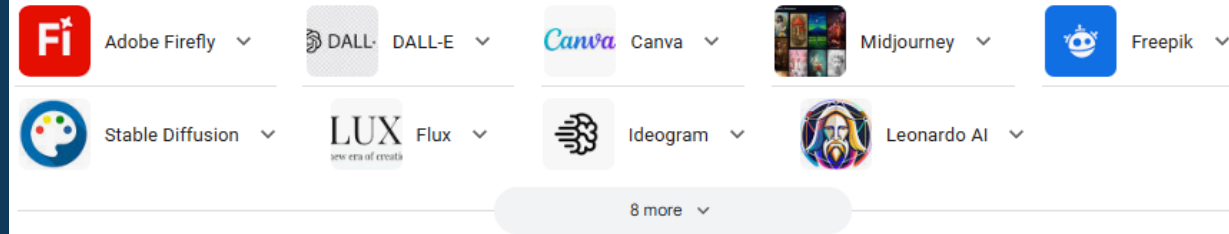


National Park Inspired Apparel.  
Support Our National Parks with  
Love Our Parks



## Popular free AI image generator

From sources across the web



UX Magazine  
<https://uxmag.com> » Design

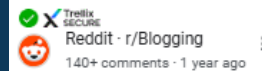
### I Tested 7 Free AI Image Generators. This One's My Pick

Freepik is my favorite free online AI image generator. Pros: It's free, with a cap. But the cap is extremely generous. You get 40 free AI images per day.



### Free AI Image Generator: Online Text to Image App

Produce AI-generated images and art with a text prompt using Canva's AI photo generator apps: Text to Image, DALL-E by OpenAI, and Imagen by Google Cloud.



### What are some good free AI image generators? : r/Blogging

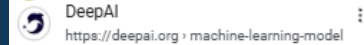
Photoleap is the best one that I've found. It has a 7 day free trial and there is no limit, and the quality is great.

144 answers · Top answer: Ideogram, Playground, Leonardo

Best AI image generator? : r/aipromptprogramming ... 984 answers Feb 28, 2025

What's the best free image generator AI (with image ... 120 answers Jul 27, 2023

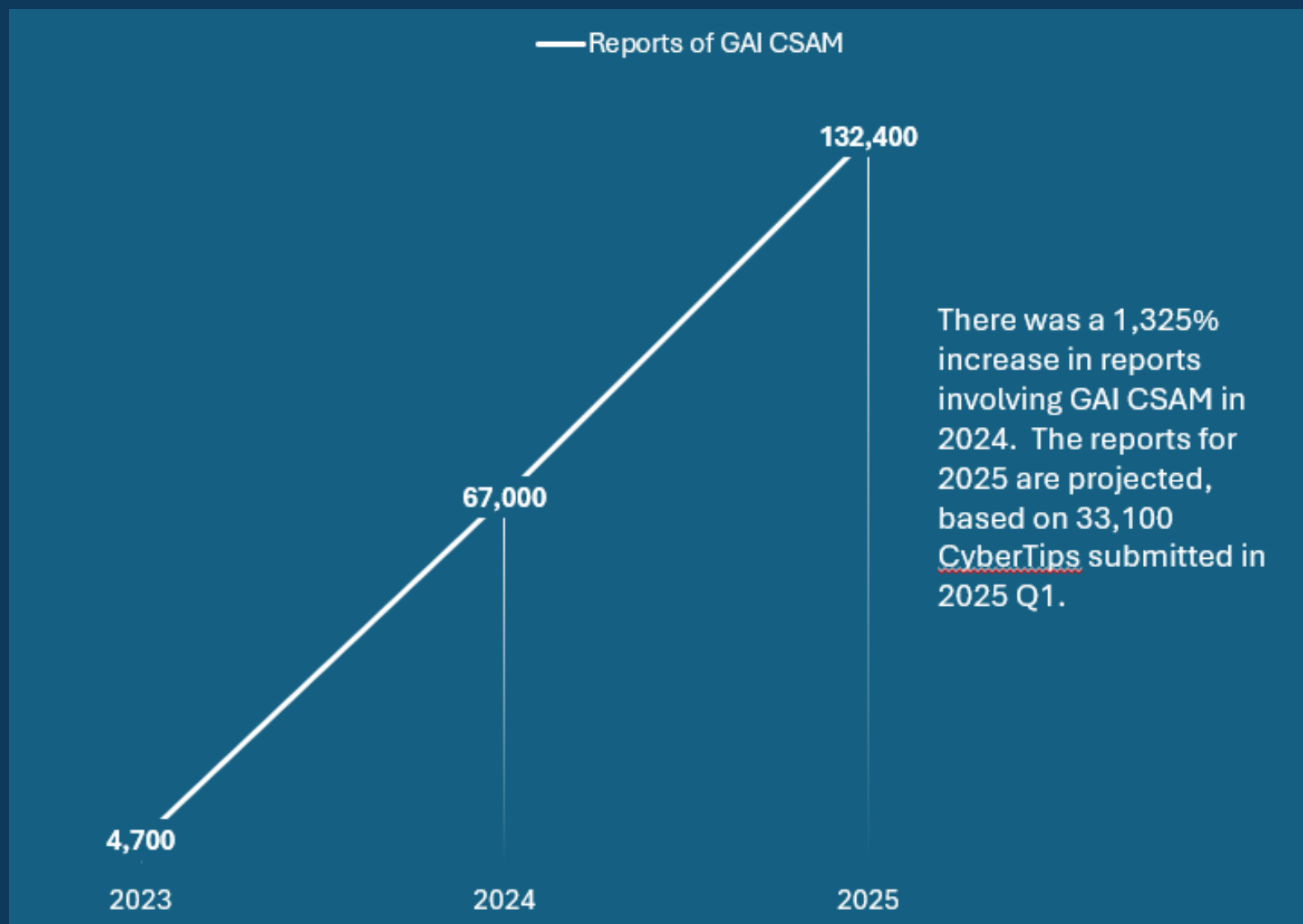
More results from [www.reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com)



### AI Image Generator

DeepAI's Free Online AI Image Generator gives you the power to visualize your imagination in seconds. Just describe your vision and watch it come to life.









# Child Exploitation and AI

- Manipulated/deepfake images

## *Teen Girls Confront an Epidemic of Deepfake Nudes in Schools*

Using artificial intelligence, middle and high school students have fabricated explicit images of female classmates and shared the doctored pictures.

## **5. Increase in Sophistication**

- **Deletion and Encryption**
- **Use of VPNs and Other Obfuscation Tools**
- **Use of Hidden Folders and Dark Web**

# 4. Case Study:

***United States of America v. Marco Pagano,  
No. 24-CR-20360-ALTMAN (S.D. Fla. 2024)***

# Background

- Snapchat
- Infiltrated a group of girls at a UK high school
- Word got around school
- February 2024, teacher heard about it, intervened and called law enforcement
- UK law enforcement interview minors

# Investigation

- Four Snapchat Accounts: @marcopio35, @markstuffpam, @marcopio3366, @marcopio2024
- Search Warrant to Snap, Inc.
- Subpoena to PayPal
- Subpoena Info from Snapchat and PayPal



# Takedown

- Warrants
- Recorded Interview
- Arrest Decision
- Criminal Complaint



# Criminal Complaint

- Reactive
- Detention
- Value of Detailed Information in Affidavit
- Value of Charging Certain Crimes



# Initial Appearance and Detention Hearing

- Initial Appearance  
Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 5
- Bail Reform Act and  
Presumption Cases  
18 U.S.C. § 3142(e)
- Detention Hearing Set
- Complaint, Pre-Trial Services Report, Proffer





# Initial Indictment: Timing Considerations

- Timing: Federal Rule of Criminal Procedure 5.1(c)
- Avoiding Preliminary Examination
- Approval Process
- Arraignment

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA  
**24-20360-CR-ALTMAN/SANCHEZ**  
CASE NO.

18 U.S.C. § 2422(b)  
18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e)  
18 U.S.C. § 2253  
18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
v.  
MARCO PAGANO,  
Defendant.

INDICTMENT

The Grand Jury charges that:

GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

At all times material to this Indictment:

FILED BY MP D.C.  
  
Aug 21, 2024  
ANGELA E. NOBLE  
CLERK U.S. DIST. CT.  
S. D. OF FLA. - Miami

# Initial Indictment: Practical Considerations

- Mandatory Minimums and Statutory Maximums
- Justice for Victims
- Flexibility for Resolution
- Looking Ahead to Trial

Count #: 1

Attempted Coercion and Enticement of a Minor to Engage in Sexual Activity

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2422(b)

\* **Max. Term of Imprisonment:** Life

\* **Mandatory Min. Term of Imprisonment (if applicable):** 10 years

\* **Max. Supervised Release:** 5 years to life

\* **Max. Fine:** \$250,000

Count #: 2

Attempted Production of Child Pornography

Title 18, United States Code, Section 2251(a) and (e)

\* **Max. Term of Imprisonment:** 30 years

\* **Mandatory Min. Term of Imprisonment (if applicable):** 15 years

\* **Max. Supervised Release:** 5 years to life

\* **Max. Fine:** \$250,000

# Discovery

- Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure 16 and 16.1(c)
- Dealing with Contraband
- Rolling Production
- Discovery Conference at Agency

# **Additional Investigation**

- **Identifying Additional Minor Victims**
- **Shoring Up Charges**
- **Considering Additional Charges**
- **Further Discovery Responses to Defense**

# Superseding Information

- Purpose of Information
- Completed Crime:  
Production of CP
- Drop Unidentified Victim
- Add International Promotional  
Money Laundering, 18 U.S.C.  
§ 1956(a)(2)(A)

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

CASE NO. 24-CR-20360-ALTMAN(s)  
18 U.S.C. § 2251(a) and (e)  
18 U.S.C. § 1956(a)(2)(A)  
18 U.S.C. § 2253  
18 U.S.C. § 981(a)(1)(C)  
18 U.S.C. § 982(a)(1)

FILED BY mp D.C.  
  
Dec 19, 2024  
  
ANGELA E. NOBLE  
CLERK U.S. DIST. CT.  
S. D. OF FLA. - Miami

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

MARCO PAGANO,

Defendant.

SUPERSEDING INFORMATION

The United States Attorney charges that:

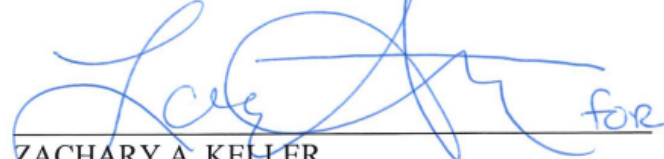

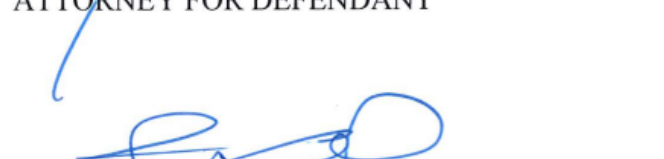
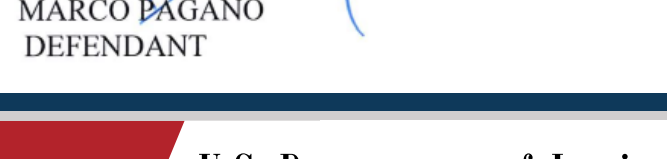
GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

At all times material to this Superseding Information:

# Plea and Proffer

- Pre-Plea Discussions
- Plea and Proffer Signing
- Change of Plea Hearing
- Pre-Sentence Investigation Report Ordered

The facts described above are not intended to be a complete recitation of the facts of this case and are merely intended to form a basis for the undersigned defendant's knowing, willful, and intentional plea of guilty.

Date: <u>2/25/25</u>	By:  HAYDEN P. O'BYRNE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
Date: <u>2/25/25</u>	By:  ZACHARY A. KELLER ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY
Date: <u>2/25/25</u>	By:  JOSEPH ROSENBAUM ATTORNEY FOR DEFENDANT
Date: <u>2/25/25</u>	By:  MARCO PAGANO DEFENDANT

# Sentencing

- Objections to Pre-Sentence Investigation Report
- Guidelines
- Impact Statements
- Arguments for Appropriate Sentence, 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a)

JUDGMENT as to **Marco Pagano** (1), Count(s) 1s, IMPRISONMENT: 320 Months as to count one, and 120 Months as to each of counts two through four to be served concurrently. SUPERVISED RELEASE: 15 years as to count one and 3 years as to each of counts two through four, to run concurrently.; Count(s) 2s-4s, IMPRISONMENT: 120 Months as to each of counts two through four to run concurrently with count one. SUPERVISED RELEASE: 3 years as to each of counts two through four to run concurrently with count one. Assessment: \$400.00 Closing Case for Defendant. Restitution Hearing set for 11/6/2025 11:00 AM before Judge Roy K. Altman. Signed by Judge Roy K. Altman on 8/11/2025. See attached document for full details. (pc) (Entered: 08/11/2025)

CS592887



"I'm looking for an extra-strength  
'ounce of prevention'."

# 5. Prevention



*"An Ounce of  
Prevention is Worth  
a Pound of Cure..."*  
- Ben Franklin



# **Your Own Voice**

- **Speaking About Risks**
- **Understanding Technology**
- **Monitoring Online Activity**
- **Teaching Vigilance**
- **Rules about Video and Photographs**
- **Reporting Suspicious Conduct**

# NCMEC Resources

- **Cyber Tipline:**  
<https://report.cybertip.org>
- **NetSmartz Programs:**  
<https://www.missingkids.org/netsmartz/resources>
- **Mental Health Support**
- **Support with Runaways**
- **24-Hour Hotline 1-800-843-5678**



# FBI Resources

- Safe Online Surfing (SOS) Program
- “Chasing the Dragon” Doc
- Local Field Offices
- Phone Line: 800-422-4453
- <https://tips.fbi.gov>

A close-up, grayscale image of a hand holding a syringe, with the needle pointing towards the bottom right. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Chasing the Dragon:  
Raising Awareness of  
Opioid Addiction**

# Questions????



# Thank you!



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