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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

Rep. Mark Foley's letter to Gov. Bush

Foley's eureka moment to exploit nude kids camp for his endangered US Senate campaign.

June 18, 2003

The Honorable Jeb Bush, Governor, State of Florida
The Honorable Charlie Crist, Attorney General, State of Florida

Dear Governor Bush and Attorney General Crist:

The New York Times today carried an article I found truly disturbing. Headlined "Old Enough to Make a Lanyard, and to Do It Nude," it is a story about a nudist camp for children – ages 11-18 – at the Lake Como Resort in Land O'Lakes, Florida.

Pasco County, according to the story, has long been a haven for nudists and nudist resorts. The reason is that, again according to the story, Florida's laws permit underage nudity as long as there is no "lewdness."

Obviously I have no way of knowing whether illegal behavior is taking place in this camp, but the situation clearly raises legitimate issues that should be addressed given that it involves minor children. I am also deeply troubled that these "camps" are businesses specifically exploiting nudity among minor children to make money.

The New York Times article also clearly raises safety issues concerning these children. For example, the article told of instances where men have made their way to the camp pool to get a "glimpse" of these naked children. I am sure this was not the first time someone tried to gain access illegally to this camp and I am sure it will not be the last. The next time, these children may not be so fortunate: the trespasser may have more on his mind than just peeping.

As Co-Chairman of the Congressional Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus, I'm asking that current Florida law be reviewed to determine if this camp is indeed legal or if it has simply slipped under the radar screen of law enforcement for the past 10 years.

If Florida law is not sufficient to address these camps, you certainly can count on my support to pursue changes in the statutes.

Over the years, while working with John Walsh and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, I have come across many stories of children endangered in even less troubling situations than these camps represent. I have been fighting for years to eliminate both child pornography and so-called "exploitive child modeling" websites and frankly I would put these camps in the same mold: I believe they may be endangering these children.

I look forward to hearing from you to see [sic] what we can do to ensure the safety of our state's children.

Sincerely,

Mark Foley
Member of Congress

Gov. Bush's response to Rep. Mark Foley

Official investigation reveals no there, there.

June 27, 2003

The Honorable Mark Foley
United States House of Representatives
104 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0916

Dear Congressman Foley:

Thank you for your letter to Governor Bush and Attorney General Crist dated June 18, 2003. The Governor shares your concern for the well being of children in the state of Florida, and is troubled by the potential that exists for inappropriate or illegal behavior involving children who are nude in the presence of non-parental adults.

The Department of Children and Families is reviewing existing records to determine whether there have been any reports of criminal acts or child abuse related to these activities. As of this writing, we are unaware of any reports alleging child abuse, neglect or exploitation related to the camp, but the Department will continue with their fact-finding. Current Florida statutory provisions regarding nudity require a showing of intent to engage in lewd or lascivious conduct; it does not criminalize mere nudity. (See Fla. Stat. SS. 800.03 -.04, 39.01(63)(f), 827.07). Should there be evidence of criminal activity or of criminal exploitation, it should be reported to local law enforcement officials or the State Attorney.

Governor Bush supports solutions to protect children from sexual and financial exploitation, and encourages members of Congress and the Florida Legislature to consider legislation that would prevent solicitation by these establishments using interstate commerce if inappropriate or illegal behavior is occurring.

The rights of parents to impart their values to their children and raise their children as they see fit are sacred. But these rights require responsibility. The state has a duty to ensure that adults, including parents and those with whom parents associate, do not exploit children or put them at risk of physical, emotional, or psychological harm. The states interest in protecting children is enhanced by local communities, which are in a stronger position to regulate activities that take place in their jurisdiction.

I trust that the above comments provide the information that you requested.

As the Department of Children and Families gathers information in the relevant districts, we will inform you if new information comes to light. On behalf of the Governor, we thank you for your ideas and for your offer to help in addressing this issue.

Sincerely yours,

Raquel Rodriguez
General Counsel to the Governor