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Friday, May 8th, 2009 | Posted by [king7856](#)

Florida Official Charged With Producing and Distributing Child Porn

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TAMPA, Fla. — A Department of Children & Families press secretary who was arrested on suspicion of enlisting children to make pornography could face more charges, police said Saturday.

Al Zimmerman, 40, was released from a Tampa jail after posting \$120,000 bail Saturday afternoon, a day after his arrest on eight felony charges of using a child in a sexual performance.

Zimmerman worked for DCF — the state agency charged with protecting Florida's children — for about two years. He was fired Friday after top officials learned of accusations against him.

According to an arrest report, Zimmerman offered two teens money in exchange for photographing them in sexual acts. The victims were ages 16 and 17 at the time of the crime, and at least one may have been in the care of DCF at one point, according to the report.

Authorities believe some of the images date back to December 2005, the arrest report showed. Zimmerman is suspected of taking photos as recently as Friday, the report showed.

At least one of the teens is from Orange County. No information was given about the other alleged victim.

Jail records do not indicate whether Zimmerman has an attorney, and messages left on his cell phone since Friday had not been returned.

Tampa police spokeswoman Laura McElroy said Saturday that investigators continue to look into whether there are more victims, and Zimmerman could face additional charges.

“We believe that there’s a possibility of Tampa victims,” McElroy said.

Zimmerman was arrested Friday in Lakeland, where he was born and where his parents live. Attempts to reach them Saturday were unsuccessful.

Zimmerman worked as a reporter for Bay News 9, a 24-hour local cable news station in the Tampa Bay area. He left the station in late 2004, according to a story posted on the station’s Web site.

If convicted, he faces up to 120 years in prison.

“We consider it to be a betrayal of the trust in this department and the people we serve,” DCF

Secretary Bob Butterworth told The Associated Press on Friday. “I do not tolerate this. The integrity of this department cannot be compromised by the actions of one individual.” Butterworth said the DCF is conducting its own investigation. Agents with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Attorney General’s office also have ongoing inquiries.

Zimmerman’s arrest is another black eye for DCF, which has faced criticism since 2002, when it was discovered that a Miami investigator had lied about visiting the foster parents of 4-year-old Rilya Wilson. The girl had actually been missing for a year and has never been found.

More recently, former secretary Lucy Hadi resigned after being found in contempt of court for not moving inmates to state hospitals if they were incompetent to stand trial. Before that, Jerry Regier left the position after an investigation showed he accepted favors from contractors. Regier had replaced Kathleen Kearney, who resigned after Wilson disappeared.

Last year, a child protection task force criticized DCF officials because a 2-year-old foster girl was missing for four months before police began searching for her.

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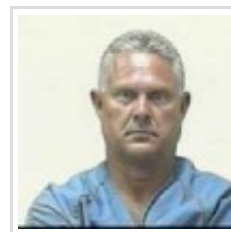
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