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Dear Parents:

I wish you all a terrific end to your summer and hope that your children are excitedly preparing for a return to school. This letter is to provide some perspective and thoughts on two cultural changes that have occurred since many of us were in school—the rising threat of schoolplace violence and the increased sharing of nude images.

The most important concern we parents have is the safety of our children. When people learn of events like school shootings or hear about even the threat of a school safety issue, it is natural for everyone to be concerned with our children's safety. This deep concern that we share and the serious response that our community takes to such threats can cause quite a stir. Unfortunately, some students see this upheaval as an opportunity to gain notoriety by making threats (whether intended to be carried out or not) against their schools, teachers, and classmates.

During the 2024-2025 school year, my office filed school threats charges against seven students in Charlevoix County. Almost always, these students claimed that they were just joking. But we do not live in an age where we can brush off such threats as *potentially* a joke, and school officials and the police cannot afford to delay their response to school threats. The response can be expensive and time-consuming for police, all the while parents are unsure about their children's safety. School threats are never funny, they are not treated like a joke by our schools, our police, or my office, and such behavior can lead to very serious charges.

School threats usually lead to charges of False Bomb and/or Terrorism Threats or Intentional Threats Against a School, School Employees, or Students. The first of these charges is a felony that can lead to imprisonment for up to 20 years if committed by an adult. Under Michigan law, it does not matter if the person truly intends to, or even has the means to, carry out the threat. The making of the threat is the crime. In part this is because the threats alone usually cause great concern, emotional harm, and use of police resources. In addition to consequences from the justice system, students may also face additional repercussions, including:

- Expulsion from school;
- Loss of scholarships and/or financial aid;
- Being required to disclose the matter on college and job applications;
- Disqualification from employment with security requirements.

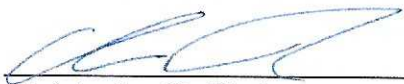
These charges also apply to parents and I am told of a troubling rise in threats that parents have made to teachers and school employees. If any such threats are made, are criminal, and are reported to my office, those will certainly result in court involvement.

Separately, and as you are all certainly aware, the increase in smartphones and social media is a major change from the world of 20 years ago. One unfortunate result of this is the prominence of teens sharing nude images with each other. Sadly, this can result in embarrassing, compromising, and even tragic situations for people who make the mistake of sharing such images. Please talk to your children about what is appropriate for them to be doing online, even with significant others or close friends. Helpful things to remind them of may be:

1. Once an image leaves their phone it cannot be brought back and they cannot control who sees it. Far too often these images are shared further—even by significant others—and end up in the hands of people who the child never wanted to have them. Pedophiles *do* seek and obtain images that were never meant to be shared.
2. If they do not want you (their parent) to see something, no one should see it. It may be helpful to ask your child how they would feel if their principal, teacher, parents, or friend's parents discovered the image. Or how they would feel if a police officer and prosecutor they never met had to review the image to determine if a crime had been committed.
3. These images might be “deleted” but that does not mean they are gone.
4. It is a crime for anyone to make, possess, or distribute nude sexual images of a person who is under the age of 18. While my office uses discretion, we do charge minors with possessing or sending illegal images when those charges are warranted.

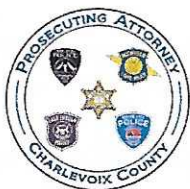
Thank you for considering my thoughts. I wish everyone well for a safe and successful school year.

Respectfully,



Christopher D. Tholen
Charlevoix County Prosecuting Attorney

cc: Sheriff Charles Vondra, CCSO
Lt. Carl Rothenberger, MSP
Chief Kevin Spate, BCPD
Chief Jill McDonnell, CPD
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